ISSN: 1081-8359

OTHER HANDS

The International Journal for Middle-earth Gaming

Issue 9 — April 1995

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EDITORIAL:
WE ARE NOT ALONE

I was thinking about entitling this our first "globalization" issue, but that sounded too cheesy. Nevertheless, that would have been an apt description of recent events since *OH* 8 last January. With the aid of a new, computerized database of Tolkien groups and publications, my friend Gary Hunnewell has helped me to establish contact with Middle-earth gamers in the former Soviet Union (many of whom have never heard of *MERP,* much less *OH).* This nev contact with our fellow enthusiasts around the world has encouraged me to feel that perhaps there *is* a future for Middle-earth gaming, despite its (apparent) invisibility in the US.

In addition to these unexpected new contacts, *OH* has itself been gaining in public visibility, and will most likely continue to do so through the end of this year. Already, we have been receiving inquiries about our journal from people who saw our plug in the back of *The Kinstrife* module. Many more will know of us a EasterCon in London and WorldCon in Glasgow, where our friends Chris Pheby and Michael Saunders (see *OH* 6/7) have agreed to sell copies. Finally, *OH* has recently joined the ranks of the Small Game Publishers Associatior (SGPA), "an association of small press publishers in the roleplaying industry, created for the purpose of providing a forum for members to exchange ideas, provide mutual support and assistance, and to promote small press and the roleplaying hobby." Taken together, we hope that these developments will lead to a wider readership for *OH* and a true "globalization" of our efforts to build a world-wide network of Middle-earth gamers.

And now to the introductions for this issue. We begin with the promised sequel to Michael Hickman's article on Dúnadan religious ritual *(OH* 8: 6-13). In this issue, Hickman turns his investigation upon the Elves at the close of the Third Age. Once again, he has produced an excellent piece of analysis of great value to role-players, and we must once again thank the Tolkien Society for kindly giving us permission to reprint Hickman's work in our journal.

Our next offering is a short piece on healers in Gondor by Nadine Salim, who will be making a contribution to the *Southern Gondor* module on this topic. Nadine has come up with some very original ideas about this ill-described group, and she and I would both be grateful if anyone has anything further to suggest or add to this essay. Who knows, maybe you'll get your idea included in the module.

Bernie Roessler, a new subscriber to *OH,* has also given us a highly intriguing and original piece on the dynamics of Dwarvish population. Since neither Dwarves nor demography are my *forte,* I cannot comment on the logical or technical points of Bernie's article, but as a

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Submission Deadline for next issue:
June 15,1995

gamemaster I am always appreciative when someone *else* has done the arduous paperwork. Many thanks!

I am pleased to announce that we will be able to maintain our "quota" of two adventure scenarios per issue for at least the next three issues. The circumstances of this are worth explaining. The existing *Southern Gondor* manuscript was unfortunately found to contain far too much adventure material for ICE's comfort (a realm module is supposed to have about 10% adventure material and 90% realm description—as it stood, however, our manuscript had a 50/50 ratio). I have invited the authors of these adventures to have them published in *OH*. Although this solution is less than ideal (particularly since we cannot pay our authors), it seemed to me eminently preferable to consigning the bulk of this material (all of which is quite good) to the dustbin.

The first of these adventures which we are offering is by Martin Rundqvist, an anthropologist by training, who has designed a scenario to illuminate his ethnography of local Gondorian culture (in this case, that of the Daen-folk of Lamedon). Our second offering this issue is an independent adventure (not connected to the *Southern Gondor* project) written by Deena McKinney, editor of the role-playing magazine *MOTiVE* (see *OH* 8: 4). Like Martin's piece, this scenario operates on a local level, dealing with Guild politics and the criminal elements of Minas Tirith during the later Third Age.

Well, I hope that you've all done your part to support *The Kin-strife* module by purchasing a copy at your local gaming store. We have been delighted to receive overwhelmingly positive feedback on it thus far. However, it is a rare occasion when a published text of this size is grammatically and conceptually without error, and *The Kin-strife* is no exception. Hence, I have included, as a guide to the perplexed, an errata list for the module. These and other corrections have been sent off to ICE and will hopefully be incorporated into the module's second printing (if and when that happens).

We hope you enjoy this issue and the many that are to follow, *and* we hope that you will all continue to support us with your subscriptions and submissions. We are, as always, at your service…

Chris Seeman
April 25,1995

OH 8 ERRATA

p. 4 Deena McKinney's phone number was incorrectly recorded. The correct number is: (706) 369-9373.

p. 27 There are two incorrect numbers on the map entitled "The Lower Caves." Room 8 between Rooms 4 and 6 should actually be Room 5, and The other room listed as 8 in the lower, right-hand corner of the map should be Room 1.

COMMUNICATIONS

Dear Chris,

Thanks for the issues of *Other Hands* (brilliant title, the significance of which wasn't lost on me). Before I go any further, let me congradulate you on your magazine. On presentation and content it knocks *Mallorn* for six—and you manage to produce it quarterly! I'm not a gamer (although I irregularly purchase mags such as *Dragon* for the artwork and reviews), so I can't comment on the specifically RPG sections, but your more general articles, editorials &c are of immense interest
to me.

Martin Baker
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Dear Chris,

With reference to *The Kin-strife* module, I was very impressed. I consider it an interesting break from the usual time setting (c. 1640), which I have always considered rather restrictive. I accept that in order to build up a series of modules it must be easier to choose one time period and stick to it, but I believe that a great many opportunities to develop interesting scenarios are being missed.

I personally am eager to see the areas of Middle-earth south and east of the "traditional" settings developed, and also more modules set at other crucial or interesting points in history. I perhaps underestimate the difficulty and problems in developing a series of modules that are generally so consistent and high in the quality of detail. However considering that *MERP* has been going on for over 10 years I find it hard to believe that so few forays have been made outside of NW Middle-earth.

Brian Carlton
John Forty's Court
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Stirling FK9 SAL
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Dear Chris,

The matters with which your magazine deals are of great interest to me and other Tolkienists here in the Far East (or Far-earth, as we call it).

Actually, the way you treat Middle-earth gaming is almost unknown here. Our Tolkien

FINE PRINT

Other Hands is an international gaming journal devoted to fantasy role-playing set in J.R.R. Tolkien's secondary world of Middle-earth. It is a quarterly, nonprofit publication welcoming submissions dealing with any aspect of gaming in the context of Tolkien's world: scenario ideas, rule suggestions, gaming product reviews, gamemastering aids, bibliographic resources, essays on Middle-earth, and whatever else our readership would like to see in print. In a word, Other Hands aims to be the definitive Tolkien-related gaming journal for a worldwide role-playing community. Within the pages of Other Hands, the interested gamer may publish materials with reference to any game mechanics he or she chooses (including Rolemaster and Middle-earth Role Playing). Such gaming material may deal with any time period of Tolkien's world, and need not be bound to what has already seen print in Iron Crown's modules. Other Hands provides this freedom because it is a nonprofit publication. Subscription rates are as follows: inside the USA—1 issue $3/4 issues $12; outside the USA—surface 1 issue $3.50/4 issues $14—air 1 issue $4.50/4 issues $18. Payment should be made to Chris Seeman: PO Box 1213, Novato, CA 94948, USA. No Eurochecks, please!

Submissions are welcome in any form (preferably legible), but are easiest to edit when received on a floppy disk. Word for Windows is the editing software currently in use, so if there is any question as to the readability of your disk, please save your document in ASCII or text-only format and include a hard copy. All submitted materials remain the copyright of the author unless we are otherwise informed. All submissions must be sent to Chris Seeman: PO Box 1213, Novato, CA 94948 (USA). Please write me or call if you encounter any difficulties, my phone number is (415) 892-9066. Please note also that I may be reached over Internet: chris1224@aol.com

groups organize outdoor games based on various periods of the history of Middle-earth. In most cases, it is impossible to follow the events described in J.R.R.T.'s books exactly, and usually we have no definite scenarios, so our games tend to run amok. Nevertheless, people seem to like it, but sometimes decide not to offend Tolkien's memory with different distortions of his ideas in historical games. (Once, the Ring was destroyed by Elrond, while the Fellowship was utterly destroyed by the Enemy.) Last year, Robin Hood games took place (not quite successfully) in Vladivostok. So we are in great need of people experienced in gaming matters and, frankly speaking, I couldn't even have imagined the existence of organizations like ICE. (No offense is meant. Here I must admit my ignorance.) The fact is that I have had no way of finding out any traces of such an organization.

I would have remained in this ignorance had it not been for a friend of mine, who asked me awhile ago if I could get any kind of Middle-earth boardgame or something like that through my American friend, Gary Hunnewell. So it was a real surprise to discover a whole world of Middle-earth gaming.

Our fans have never tried to write those episodes of Middle-earth history which were not written by Tolkien himself. That is why the materials sent by you and those produced by ICE are of great interest to our fans here, who are (for the most part) quite ignorant in these matters.

I will study the magazines you sent with great care one more time, and will tell about all this to others interested. We will appreciate any explanations or examples. I am looking forward to receiving your *Kin-strife* module. I think it will explain a lot and will show exactly what your job is like. Who knows? Maybe after that there will be people here who will decide to continue this work or to join an organization like yours. I myself am very much interested in everything concerned with Middle-earth and will be happy to give you any information of our activities. You may ask any questions, and we will try to find answers to them. Any of your advice and explanations will be appreciated. I hope for a continual correspondence.

Vyacheslav Kozlov
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Dear Chris,

Thanks for sending me the three issues of *Other Hands.* It's great! I've read them and found them to be informative and useful. People who're fond of the games like *Dungeons & Dragons* will enjoy *OH,* but the magazine'll be welcome also in another branch of role-playing to which my friends and I belong. I think I must say a few words about it. Let it be my little contribution to the *Other Hands.*

The specific kind of RPG we're going in for can be called "Field Games." I've already written about them to Gary Hunnewell, and he published my brief account in *Ravenhill;* but, you being a specialist in RPG, I feel I must explain the situation in more detail. As far as I can judge from Hunnewell's Tolkien Review, our role-playing experience is almost unique in the world.

There are Tolkien fans here who are, so to say, purely theoretical and even somewhat religious in their attitude to Tolkien's works. They usually don't approve of our activities, and we have very little in common with them. We are "the playing Tolkienists." Within this circle there are theoretically-minded people too, who differ to some extent from those who prefer practice, but the Games unite all of us.

For you better to understand what we're doing, you should have some idea of our geography. Have a look at the map, and keep in mind that it takes a traveller about 10 days to cross this country (we still consider it to be *one* country, though it was divided politically) from extreme West to extreme East. And throughout these vast spaces there are Tolkien groups and clubs which at the same time participate in the role-playing movement. By moderate estimates, there are about 2,000 active players, and almost all these people are acquainted with each other (personally or by correspondence). There are very renowned clubs in the Far East, in Siberia, in the Ural Mountains region, on the Volga river and in the European part of the country, including Ukraine and Belorus (now independent republics) . They organize series of games during the year, and everybody from other clubs can come and take part (if they have enough time and money, of course). Additionally, there's a number of so-called "convents," which are traditionally gathered each year in different places: "Nordcon" in Kotlas (North), "Sibcon" in Tomsk (Siberia, East), "Glipcon" in Ivanovo (Central Russia), and "Zilantcon" in Kazan on the Volga. At these convents, former games are discussed, new games planned, papers are read, competitions of singers and fighters are held. We also have masquerades, friendly talks, etc. This allows us to get all necessary information and to coordinate our plans for the next year.

The local clubs usually make 2 games a year, in May and in September, for 2 or 3 days. The number of players varies from 40 to 200, and they come for the most part from one club, although guests are always invited too. Such games are called "small" or "regional." They are considered as training before the main event of the year: the "Big" summer game. People wishing to organize such games usually make a claim for it in November at "Zilantcon." They must work out the initial layout, the rules, distribute them among the players and rent a convenient patch of land (the "polygon"). The preparations begin immediately after the claim has been made, and in July or August, all teams meet in the chosen place. Here the number of players is from 200 to 500, and the Game lasts for 4 or 5 days.

Oh, I wanted to give you only an outline of what is going on here but, after having written such a lot, I see that essential things remain unexplained. So, if you're still not bored, I'll try to describe what our games are like.

They have no scenarios, only certain initial conditions. Besides Tolkien, the themes of the regional games can be historical events, folklore or fantasy books. The Big Game is always dedicated to Tolkien. The first was held in 1990 near Krasnoyarsk (Siberia), the 2nd in 1991 near Moscow (both based on Third Age events), the 3rd (1992, Ufa) was based on *The Silmarillion,* the 4th and 5th (1993 and 1994), in Ural Mountains and again near Moscow were based on the Second Age.

The only likeness between the indoor RPG and our field ones is that we also have written rules, gamemasters, and some typical characters (fighter, healer, wizard, minstrel, etc.). Game time is not real time (e.g., one real hour equal one game month), and such things as death and birth are, of course, only imagined, but everything else is quite real.

The polygon is about 2 to 4 km long and wide. There are woods, a river or lake, hills, etc. You walk and work, prepare food and sleep (very little indeed!), and the fights and flights, rituals and treaties are real! In fact, each game is a serious psychological experiment with unpredictable results. One must often have strong nerves to endure it, but it has been already proven that these impressions generally are beneficial for body and soul. People return home very tired, but happy, and begin to wait impatiently for the next summer.

The participants range from 12 to 60 years of age (mainly 17-28), among whom are school and university students, computer specialists, engineers, teachers, mathematicians, biologists, historians, economists, and so on. Because of hard economic conditions, all these highly qualified people are paid rather scarcely for their work, and to attend a Big Game (in our measure) costs a considerable sum of money. The games are nonprofit events and we have almost no sponsors. But people do everything they can to arrive at the polygon and to live another life in Middle-earth. The pleasure is great and worth any effort!

Alina Nemirova
Pobedy Avenue, 66A-110
Kharkov 310204
Ukraine

Dear Chris,

I will be doing the "Small Press" review section for *Amon Hen* and will be sure to start reviewing EVERYTHING that I get for the column. *AH* has been looking scanty lately, so hopefully I'll be able to provide a consistent 2-4 pages per issue. So, perhaps you'll get a little more publicity for *OH.* Speaking of which, I am (finally) getting around to reading *OH.*

I find some of it really annoying—not anything you've done in particular, but just the ideas behind some of the articles. I know that some of you folks want to fill in the empty blanks, but Sauron's daughter (!?!). There seems to be an overdependence on magic as well, which looks like it is being countered by Tolkien fans who realize that "magic" played a small part in the grand scheme of things. I enjoy the critical reviews—I like when you are on top of the ball, and I particularly liked your article on religion in Middle-earth.

I think that someone else did a survey of Middle-earth population in a TS publication. Also, did you catch Jason Finch's article about the condition of Gondor during the Third Age. It originally appeared in *Gondtengwen* and then *Amon Hen* (123: 6-7).

On Queen Berúthiel (*OH* 3: 13-18), I think that you overlook the most obvious reason why she could have been feared/why she found out things about other people. It is a good way to keep certain people under your thumb (whether it is the butcher who cheats on the meat scales, or the treasurer who has a loose purse). Such knowledge is power. And, being the queen, one would have to have great proof against her to confront her without pain of death. Could her marriage have been one of reconciliation or reunification between the King's Men and the Faithful? One last thing: her communication with cats is very possible. (After all, the men of Dale could understand the language of birds.)

Gary Hunnewell
2030 San Pedro
Arnold, MO 63010
USA

FRONTLINES

As we speak, the *Elves* people supplement and the revised *Creatures of Middle-earth* should be arriving at your local game store. *The Kin-strife* is out (at last!) and appears to be doing fairly well (though it is still dwarfed by the success of the *Dol Guldur* citadel module, which is also out). Finally, a *Northwestern Middle-earth Map Set* has been released which contains the great majority of Pete Fenlon's work (including hitherto unseen maps of Anfalas and Lindon). Regrettably, these maps do not all fit together (perhaps this will be remedied in a future edition).

On its cover, *The Kin-strife* is described as a "Sourcebook." This category of product was not mentioned in ICE's original announcement of their *MERP* revision project, but subsequently came into being as an "anomaly" rubric, for use with publications that did not quite fit the purer description of Realm, Citadel, People, or Adventure module. This accommodation promises some interesting possibilities for future *MERP* projects that could be devoted to other specific eras of Middle-earth history. *Palantír Quest,* for example, offers some tantalizing ideas for an early Fourth Age sourcebook that might detail northwestern Middle-earth during the reign of King Elessar and his son.

As for up and coming publications for 1995, here is the latest timetable. The *Shire* realm module has been pushed forward to a June release date, a recently announced *Angmar* realm module (a revision of *Empire of the Witch-hng)* is scheduled for August, and a *Northmen* people supplement (including material from *Riders of Rohan)* should be appearing sometime in September. At the moment, we are hoping (perhaps optimistically) for an October or November release date for the *Southern Gondor* realm module.

Finally, there has been a recent turn of events widi the *Northern Gondor* realm module. The current revision authors have decided to abandon the project, and have turned it over to yours truly. Given my current work on *Southern Gondor,* work will not be able to proceed on the sister module until the Spring of 1996. The completion of the Gondor modules is of high priority to both ICE and to myself, so *Northern Gondor* will be taking precedence over the *Dúnedain* people book I was to begin following my work on *Southern Gondor.* But fear not! I remain committed to the *Dúnedain* project, and it *will* appear eventually.

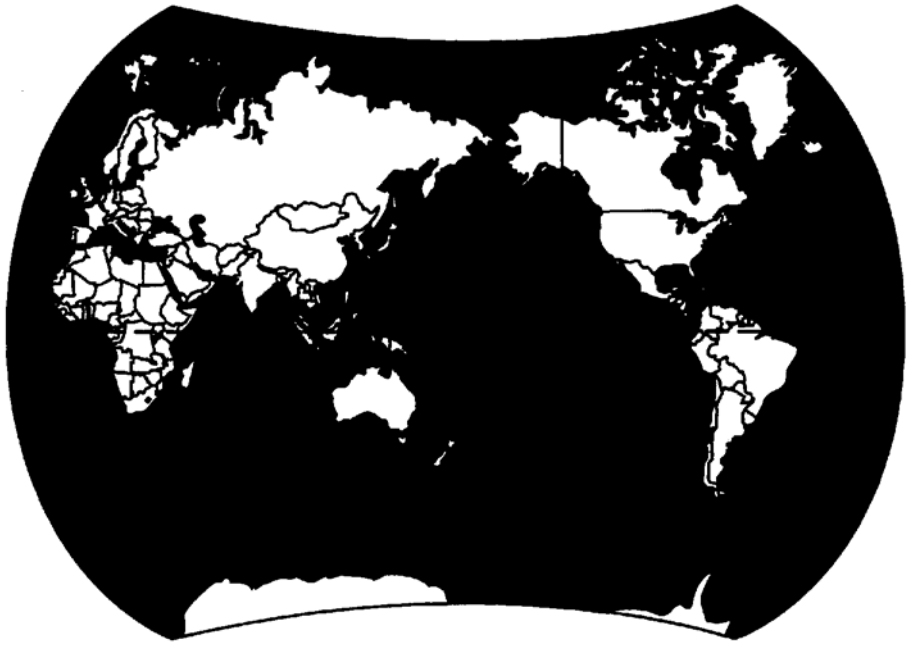
Reporter: Chris Seeman

A Global Directory of Middle-earth Gaming

[Extracted from the Tolkien Fannish and Scholarly Activities and Publications *directory for 1992 and 1993, compiled by Gary Hunnewell: 2030 San Pedro, Arnold, MO 63010, USA]*

For those of you who have not yet crossed paths with him, Gary Hunnewell is the iiber-Tolkien completist par excellence on this planet. For many long aeons he has gathered unto himself all things Tolkien, and now at last he has initiated a project to bring order out of primordial chaos, by creating an annually updated database of the sea of extant information pertaining to Tolkien fandom around the globe. Beginning with the year 1992, Gary has been compiling a directory and bibliography of all Tolkien-related groups.

This includes groups and publications devoted to fantasy role-playing, and with the magic of computerized word-searching, I have been able to pull together all such references appearing in Gary's database for the years 1992 and 1993. (Supplements to this will be presented in future issues of Other Hands *as soon as Gary releases new volumes of his work.) It was encouraging to discover so diverse an array of interests in Middle-earth gaming (of both the lire and indoor varieties), and I hope that all of us will make an effort to alert Gary to any additions that may have eluded his all but omniscient gaze.*



Role-playing Groups within Tolkien Societies

Pohjoisneljännys (Suomen Tolkien-seurary smial)

[Eppu Errasti, Neilikkatic 13 B 10, 98580 Oulu, Finland]

Pohjoisneljännys produced a library display of Tolkien in addition to an introductory lecture of the Finnish Tolkien Society which was presented at a role-playing convention organized by the Oulu Town Library, the Oulu SF Society "Polaris" and the Northern Ostrobothnia Summer University, in Oulu, Finland, from 27-28 March, 1993.

Hautakero (Suomen Tolkien-seurary smial)

[Sampsa Sihvola, Laivurinkatu 33 C 66, 00150 Helsinki, Finland]

Activities include role-playing, strategy games, etc.

Telcontar (Suomen Tolkien-seurary smial)

[Inari Kylänen, Airoparintie 5-7 c17, 00980 Helsinki, Finland]

The smial held weekly meetings and had many activities, including organizing two live action role-playing games (and attended three others).

Tirion (Suomen Tolkien-seurary smial)

[Kaisa Mäki-Petäjä, Koutosentie 36, 69100 Kannus, Finland]

Live action role-playing meetings took place in Kannus, Finland, on 19-20 July, and 17-19 September, and in Nivala, Finland, on 12-14 November, 1993. Tirion took part in one live action role-playing meeting arranged by the Telcontar smial in Helsinki. Contact is mainly by mail and telephone. A local newspaper, *Kaleva,* had an article about Tirion and live action role-playing.

Chaire d'etudes ludiques (La Faculti des Etudes elfiques)

[Sylvain Fontannaud, 3, square Louis Braille, 94700 Maison-Alfort, France]

The chaire's purpose is the adaptation of Tolkien's imaginary background to role-playing games, wargames and other boardgames;

but they advocate a more rigorous (and so more fantastic) adaptation than Iron Crown Enterprises' adaptations. Publication: *Les jeux sont F.E.E.* [French, irregular]. Each issue is available for two International Reply Coupons.

Wanderers of Rhudaur (Tolkien Society smial)

[Richard Crawshaw, 69 Kirkstall Close, Toothill, Swindon, Wilts., SN5 8EF, England]

Role-playing within the scope of Tolkien's Middle-earth. Meeting held at Easter in Swindon, Wilts., England.

Rivendell (Unquiendor inn)

[Jerry Nieukoop, Beugelskamp 26, Deventer, The Netherlands]

From the beginning, Rivendell has been a meeting-place for role-players. Though we have had many a discussion about Tolkien, the topic has even more often to do with role-playing. On the even months a subject is chosen by one of the founders or guests. This subject has something to do with role-playing and, more often than not, Tolkien. Subjects vary from "Do you like role-playing for the same reasons as you like Middle-earth?" or "Is MERP suited to Middle-earth?" or "How would you play an elf from Mirkwood?" On the odd months we try to deal with the subject of the month before in a role-playing game. Rivendell is still very much alive after four years, more than forty smial evenings and more than sixty different visitors!

Elen Feanaro (Mellon Sub-group)

[Vyacheslav Kozlov, p. Pervostroiteley, 19-85, Komsomolsk-on-Amur 681024, Russia]

Role-playing is one of their activities (see Communications).

Doriath (Sociedad Tolkien Española)

[Pablo Gines Rodriguez, c/ Florencia, 7, 3°D, 08026 Barcelona, Spain]

Organized role-playing games related to Middle-earth for the Casal de Sarria from 1 -3 July, 1992. From 23-25 April, 1993 in the Centro Cívico de San Ildefonso in Cornellè activities included debate about role-playing in Middle-earth.

Rivendell-Imladris (Sociedad Tolkien Española smial)

[Luis Gonzalez Baixauli, C/Pisuerga 4, 4° A, 47009, Valladolid, Spain]

The first Tolkien Conference in Valladolid was held from 4-5 January, 1993. During the conference a debate was held on Tolkien and role-playing; role-playing games were run. Also, there was an exposition on the art and mistakes in *MERP* modules.

Mellonath Galabargian (Forodrim game guild)

[address unknown]

Mellonath Seregon (Forodrim fighting guild)

[Ewiz Ehrsson, Becksjudarvägen 41, 1 tr, 131 36 Nacka, Sweden]

Activities include live role-playing and fighting with padded weapons.

Meanwhile, in Turkey...

[Emre Tuncer, Pk. 27 81072, Suadiye/ Istanbul, Turkey]

A new group (1993) based loosely around Tolkien, fantasy role-playing, and fantasy/science fiction literature. Gaming competitions are included as one of their activities.

Variag

[Alina Nemirova, Pobedy-avenue, 66A-110, Kharkov 3 10204, Ukraine]

A role-playing club that participated in the 1992 Tolkien Games in Russia. Also participated in two Tolkien Games in the Ural Mountains and on the River Volga in August of 1993 (see Communications).

Donetzk University, Ukraine

This group was organized in 1993. They write verses, songs and play role-playing games.

Gaming-related Publications

Anders Blixt and Kathrin Vestergren: "En ny skygge—en rollespilsidé til Midgårds fjerde alder" (1993) *Athelas* 2: 12-16 [Also published in *Other Hand 5:* 20-23]

Anders Blixt: "Midgård i en Fjårran Spegel: Rollspelsförfattande till J.R.R. Tolkiens Arda"(1993) *Angerthas* 33: 6-10 [Also published in *Other Hands* 2: 21-22]

Tomasz Borówka: "Role-Playing w Sródziemiu" (1993) Gwaihirze 46: 40-41 [review of MERP]

Jerry and Frodo: "Het rollenspel" (1993) *Lembas* 59: 12-13 [introduction to role-playing]

Gandalf: "Igry v fantastike" (1993) *Pioneer of Middle-earth 5*: 5-6

Robert Grybos: "Rolemaster—krótka charakterystyka systemu" (1993) *Vingilote* 1: 26-28 [characteristics *of Rolemaster and MERP]*

Mickaël Ivorra: "References to Tolkien" (1993) *Lembas* 62: 10-11 [references to Tolkien in role-playing games, etc.]

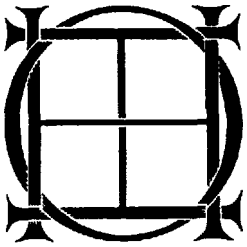
Mika Laaksonen: "Lord of the Rings: roolipeli keski-maasta" (1993) *Legolas* 3: 20-22 [Review of *Lord of the Rings Adventure Game]*

"Nytt fra Bri" (1993) *Angerthas* 33: 24-26 [news of Tolkien role-playing games at Regnco]

Bjørn Tore Sund: "RegnCon II i Bergen— Tolkien-quiz som del av showet" (1993) *Angerthas* 35: 29 [account of a Tolkien quiz during a role-playing convention]

The Religious Ritual and Practice of the Elves of Middle-earth at the time of the War of the Ring

Michael R. Hiclonan:
[First published in *Mallorn,* the Journal of the Tolkien Society: 40 Hunters Hill, High Wycombe, Bucks HP13 7EW, England]



In a draft letter written in 1954 Tolkien denied that there was any "religion" in Middle-earth (Letters: 193)*.*[1] *However he was referring to the existence of an organised religion with buildings, priestly cults, etc.: In fact there is much evidence of religion in* The Lord of the Rings. *In page 13* of The Road Goes Ever On *Tolkien wrote about Elvish songs in praise of Elbereth, "The Elves sing hymns to her," and then commented," (These and other references to religion in* The Lord of the Rings *are frequently overlooked)."*[2] *In a small way I would like to remedy this "overlooking."*

As a teacher of Religious Studies and as an avid reader of Tolkien's books I have often thought about studying the religious practices and beliefs of the peoples of Middle-earth by applying to them the techniques employed in the study of religion.

The study of religion has been transformed over the past few decades. One of the most influential thinkers in bringing about this change has been Professor Ninian Smart of Lancaster University. He developed a method of studying the phenomenon of religion by categorising it in the six major ways in which all religion manifests itself. These ways he refers to as "dimensions." They have become well known and are called Smart's Six Dimensions of Religion.

Briefly, they are 1) the teachings of a religion that are passed on as a series of beliefs (doctrine), 2) the common sets of stories/presuppositions that act as a cohesive force for followers of a religion (myth), 3) the behavioural standards of right and wrong (ethics), 4) the practices by which people express their beliefs (ritual), 5) the encounter with the "divine" (experience), and 6) the interaction between one person or group and another (social).

This article, therefore, is not a study of the origins of Tolkien's thought or an exploration of his own Christian beliefs and how they influenced his writings. Rather it is an attempt to look at these writings in order to see what the religious beliefs and practices were of the peoples of Middle-earth at the time of the War of the Ring (hereinafter referred to as the "War"). With the limitations of space and the amount and type of material available I have restricted this article to a study of just one of the six dimensions (ritual) of one of the peoples (the Elves) of Middle-earth.

We possess two types of material from Middle-earth. First, the hymns, invocations and other statements of the Elves (and of the other peoples influenced by Elvish culture) as recorded by Tolkien; secondly, the rest of the text of Tolkien's writings which can be taken as a kind of commentary or record of the events and thinking of the time.

Elvish culture in Middle-earth by T.A. 3020 was in decline but because of their life-span and life-style it can be assumed that many of their religious beliefs and practices had remained relatively unchanged over several millenia, and therefore evidence from writings other that *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* can be used.

There were four main centres of Elvish culture in Middle-earth at the time of the War: the Havens, Rivendell, Lothlórien, and Northern Mirkwood. There are very few references to religious practice or belief at the Havens, and not many more to those at Lothlórien or in Mirkwood but most of the basic ritual was probably common to all these centres. This article is based upon the culture at Rivendell, which was basically a combination of Noldorin and Sindarin. Where there are clear differences, these will be noted.

Basic Beliefs

The basic Elvish beliefs are expressed in the three major hymns recorded in *The Lord of the Rings:* the pilgrimage hymn of Gildor and company (LotR I: 88-89), the hymn in the Hall of Fire at the House of Elrond (LotR I: 250), and the hymn of Galadriel (more personal than the others) on the departure of the companions from Lothlórien (LotR I: 394).

All of these hymns, called songs in *The Lord of the Rings* but hymns in *The Road Goes Ever On* [see note 21], are addressed to Elbereth, and they each refer to Elbereth's relation to the stars. They also speak of Elbereth's place far beyond Middle-earth, but the Elves clearly believed that their prayers could reach her. As such Elbereth is seen by the Elves as one whose power, although limited, could be used for protection, or to influence or change events (Letters: 193).

The Elves believed that there was only one God, Eru Ilúvatar, but in *The Lord of the Rings* that name is never used by Elves. It must be assumed that the name was too holy to utter and that, if misused, would bring about dire consequences for the user, as for Fëanor and his sons (Sil: 88).[3] As a substitute in blessing and in invocation therefore, they used the name of Elbereth or referred to the stars that she had kindled. Although the Noldor were taught many of their skills by Aulë, it is Elbereth as star-kindler who most attracted their devotion. There were opportunities, which will be referred to later (see pilgrimage; p. 10 below) for Elves to obtain visions of Elbereth.

There was a general belief in the ability to go over the Sea to Eressëa, indeed in the Noldor and Sindar it was a longing that could not be suppressed. Both Galadriel's lament (LotR I: 388-389, 394) and Legolas' song (LotR III: 234-235) express this concept, one in sadness, the other in expectation.

The Calendar and the Liturgical Year

The only calendar that is recorded in *The Lord of the Rings* is the Calendar of Imladris (LotR III: 385-390)." However it is probable that this calendar is basically the same as that for other Elvish communities. It would be very unlikely for there to be different days for the New Year or Midsummer days.[4] The length of the seasons differed and there may have been different festivals, each according to local circumstances (ibid: 385), for example, the Elves at the Havens may well have celebrated a festival connected with the Sea that would have been inappropriate in northern Mirkwood.

DEDICATION	QUENYA	SINDARIN
the Stars	Elenya	Orgilion
the Sun	Anarya	Oranor
the Moon	Isilya	Orithil
the Two Trees	Aldúya	Orgalahad
the Heavens	Menelya	Ormenel
the Valar	Valanya	Orbelain

The calendar of Imladris included a week of six days, enquië (pl. enquier), which, as Tolkien comments, existed for "ritual rather than practical purposes (ibid)." The numbers 6 and 12 held special significance, and they observed six seasons throughout the solar year. The names of each of the days of the week were:

These show whom and what the Elves revere. As the names are recorded in both major languages they were almost definitely common to all the Elvish centres. The enquier existed primarily for ritual purposes; therefore it can be assumed that rituals took place on one or more of these days, and definitely on the last day which was, "the chief day of the week." Each day began at sunset, but it seems that the most important parts of the day were connected with the stars, "tindómë" or star-fading, and "undómë" or star-opening (ibid: 389).

The differences between Elves and Hobbits in the timing of the start of the day can cause confusion when comparing calendars. It is possible to draw an Elvish calendar and compare it, day for day, with the Shire Calendar in *The Lord of the Rings* (ibid: 384). We are told that the Elves' New Year, "corresponded more or less with Shire April 6 (ibid: 390; note 1). However, we do not know whether Yestarë began at sunset on April 5 or April 6, both of which are possible. The effect of this difference will be seen later in the dating of the feast to celebrate the victory at the Ford of Bruinen.

The liturgical year had six seasons, and included at least three major festivals or periods of festival which were: a) a two day festival incorporating the last day of the year, "Mettarë," which concluded the winter, and New Year's day, "Yestarë," which heralded the spring (ibid: 386); b) Midsummer's day, [which seems to have taken place on the 31 st or 32nd day of Lairë, not the 36th) and c) a three day festival, "Enderi," at the end of Autumn, which was used as a day of thanksgiving (probably for the harvest) (ibid).

There are no specific references to the last of these in *The Lord of the Rings,* but its existence and celebration can be inferred from the parallel on Númenor, where the three days of festival were the first days of Spring, midsummer and the end of autumn (UT: 166). Its existence can also be inferred from the fact that Elves usually called the year "loa," meaning "growth," for in these matters they were primarily concerned with, "the seasonal changes in vegetation (LotR III: 385)." The Elves relied for food, other than by trading for it, on growing, gathering and hunting and would undoubtedly have had some form of harvest thanksgiving in common with all similar communities today.

The ritual year, giving both Quenya and Sindarin, can therefore be reconstructed as follows (Once again, as this calendar is recorded in both Quenya and Sindarin, it can be assumed that its basis was followed by all Elves.):

QUENYA	SINDARIN	TRANSLATION	DAYS	FESTIVAL
Yestarë		New Year	1	New Year Festival
Tuilë	Ethuil	Spring	54	
Lairë	Laer	Summer	72	including the Mid-summer festival [1 day]
Yavië	Ivas	Autumn	54	
Enderi		Mid-year	3	Autmn festival
Quellë	Firith	Fading	54	
Hirvë	Rhiw	Winter	72	
Coirë	Echuir	Stirring	54	
Mettarë		Year End	1	Last Day festival

Festivals, Rituals, and Practices

Elvish society was hierarchical and led by hereditary kings or lords whose authority was both secular and sacred; this too was paralleled by Númenórean society. The senior Elvish line in Middle-earth was that of Finwë, represented by only two families at the time of the War, that of Elrond and Galadriel. In each society in which they lived, these two individuals, and their families, were the leaders.

The Elf-lord had a number of ritual functions of which one of the most important was presiding at festivals. The president was sat in a chair whilst minstrels sang.[5] On page 148 of *The Hobbit* it is recorded that Thranduil sat "on a chair of carven wood," wore crowns of different flora for the different seasons, berries and red leaves in autumn and woodland flowers in the spring, and "held a carven staff of oak." This ritual decoration may only have been practised in Thranduil's realm but Galadriel at her last meeting with the Fellowship wore, "a circlet of golden flowers" in her hair (LotR I: 388). Given the Elvish love of trees and flowers it is most probable that similar rituals were performed in most Elf communities. In communities influenced by the Noldor, prayers of praise and thanksgiving to Yavanna were likely. It also seems probable that in Thranduil's realm there were ceremonies at the New Year and at the Enderi when the king put on a new crown to the accompaniment of feast, dance and song.

The normal festival ritual seems to have been a feast, followed by drinking, singing and according to *The Hobbit,* dancing.[6] These activities often took place in the open air. As the day started at sunset, the festival would presumably start in the evening and continue till dawn at least. The fact that the day started at sunset is the reason for *The Hobbit* referring to Midsummer's eve (ibid) and *The Lord of the Rings* to Midsummer's day.[7] In Elvish terms it was one and the same day.

At the end of the feast there would have been some form of ritual liquid to drink, this being a normal conclusion to feasts. The Valar used such a ritual drink at their festival, the Eldar believing this to have been "made from the honey of the undying flowers in the gardens of Yavanna, though it was clear and translucent (Road: 69)." This drink was called "miruvóre," which was the same name as that given to "the cordial of Imladris."[8] Galadriel gave each member of the Fellowship white mead as a cup of parting (LotR I: 390-391), the last and (only) meal that they had with Celeborn and Galadriel, and in her final lament she referred to miruvóre and posed the question, "who now shall refill the cup for me (ibid: 394)?"

The singing would include hymns to Elbereth, other hymns (or songs) of the Blessed Realm, and epic poetry recalling the mythic deeds of the ancestors. Another of the major functions of the Elf-lord was to be the repository of Elvish lore. There was no sacred text, being immortal such a collection of ancient stories was probably not required, but there were lore-masters and some collections of ancient stories were written down. These stories, such as the story of Tinúviel sung by Aragorn to the Hobbits to lift up their hearts, were inspirational and thought-provoking (ibid: 204-205). Their recitation would be an important event. It is no accident that the greatest of the lore-masters at the time of the War was also one of the greatest Elf-lords, Elrond.

These celebrations did not take place only at the regular festivals but at any other time that was deemed appropriate, for example, the victory at the Ford of Bruinen. On that occasion a special room was used, the Hall of Fire. In Gandalf's words, "Here you will hear many songs and tales—if you can keep awake. But except on high days it usually stands empty and quiet, and people come here who wish for peace, and thought. There is always a fire here, all the year round, but there is little other light (ibid; 242)." From the reference to "high days" it must be assumed that it was the place of the great festivals as well as the occasional celebrations such as the victory at the Ford of Bruinen.

On a comparison of calendars it can be calculated that, if Yestarë began on the evening of April 6 S.R., then this feast took place at the beginning of the high day of the ritual week, Valanya. If so, it may be that entering the Hall of Fire arid singing hymns to Elbereth and other of the Valar on Valanya was the regular practice. However, this is very slim evidence from which to draw such a conclusion as it could equally be that it was the nature of the feast that led to the Hall of Fire being used rather than the day.

The only wedding involving Elves recorded in *The Lord of the Rings* was that of Aragorn and Arwen. This took place on the festival of Midsummer. It is not clear whether this great day was chosen as it was such an important event or whether or not Elvish weddings would normally be celebrated on festival days. As Elves were in no hurry they could probably have waited until the next festival.

Daily Ritual and Practice

No Elf in *The Lord of the Rings* would invoke the name of Eru Ilúvatar (although on the most important occasions, the head of the exiled Númenórean community was prepared to do so). Instead Elves both blessed and invoked using both the name of Elbereth and the stars. A common invocation at time of great peril was, 'Elbereth Gilthoniel" used by Legolas as he saw the carrier of the Nazgûl (ibid: 403), and by Hobbits like Frodo under

similar circumstances (ibid: 208). Apparently such an invocation had great power, for even the Nazgûl were troubled by it (ibid: 210).

Elbereth and the stars were also used in blessings, for example, Gildor's farewell to Frodo, "may the stars shine upon the end of your road (ibid: 94)," "may Elbereth protect you (ibid)," and Elrond's farewell to the Fellowship, "May the stars shine upon your faces (ibid: 294)!"

The Elvish love of the stars is reflected in what was probably a daily ritual. The Elves of Glidor's company "all burst into song" when the evening stars appeared (ibid: 91; this was not on Valanya). This may have only been a Noldorin ritual as there is no record of Legolas doing this, or amongst the Elves of Lothlórien. The singing was followed by a meal around a fire.

The Silmarillion records that the returning Noldor under Fingolfin "blew their trumpets…at the first rising of the Moon (Sil: 90)." It also records that before the Fifth Battle, "the trumpets of the Eldar greeted the rising of the Sun…,"[10] and that "the people of Gondolin were upon the walls to await the rising Sun, and sing their songs at its uplifting, for the morrow was the great feast that they called the Gates of Summer (ibid: 242)" However there is no mention in *The Lord of the Rings* of any ritual connected with either the moon or the sun, nor is there any mention of the blowing of trumpets. The Elves in the Third Age lived a quieter existence.

It may be that the end of the First Age brought about a change in Elvish attitude and the Elves of Middle-earth returned to their earlier devotion of the stars and of Elbereth. However the Elves of Lothlórien where the sun was very bright may well have continued such a practice. The other Valar are almost unmentioned in *The Lord of the Rings.*

As the Hall of Fire was a place where one could go for peace and quiet it is likely that the Elves practiced some form of quiet prayer or meditation, but probably not on a regular basis. They were able, through song, to bring their thoughts to life" and were also able to "sleep" by "resting their minds" in a kind of deep, but open-eyed, meditations.[12]

As far as I can calculate there is, with the possible exception of the celebration of the victory at the Ford of Bruinen, no record of the rituals concerned with the last day of the week, but it is most likely that there were hymns and prayers to the Valar after whom the day was named.

Liturgical language

Many people have used ancient or archaic languages with which to pray, but it seems that the Elves used Sindarin mainly. The only recorded exception of a prayer in Quenya is Galadriel's Lament (LotR I: 394). This was her birth language but hardly her usual one as there would have been very few Noldor in Lothlorien where a form of Sindarin was spoken. Galadriel may have used Quenya on this occasion as the particular prayer was so personal.

The hymn heard by Hobbits in the Hall of Fire was in Sindarin but of a form much influenced by Quenya (Road: 72), however this seems to have been the normal language of the singers if in rather archaic form. The pilgrimage hymn of Gildor and company was also in Sindarin, the name Elbereth is used rather than Varda. One difference between liturgical and vernacular Sindarin was the use of archaic pronouns such as "thee," whereas the word "thee" is not used in normal speech (ibid).[13] Although there is no evidence, it is quite likely that the Noldor would use Quenya on very important occasions and a "high" Sindarin for other rituals. Sindarin Elves would probably have used "high" Sindarin for all rituals.

Places of Worship

Buildings built specifically for worship did not exist. As Eru Ilúvatar alone was worshipped (the Valar were understood as intermediaries) any such building would have been thought blasphemous. This practice was paralleled by the Númenóreans both in Númenor and in Middle-earth (UT: 166). However this did not prevent any race from having sacred or hallowed places. These places were left open to the sky and there were no buildings. Among their holy places the Dúnedain had Amon Anwar, "the Hill of Awe" at the centre of Gondor where Elendil was buried (ibid: 302) and other places such as the hallow on Mount Mindolluin where Gandalf led Aragorn to the sapling of the White Tree (LotR III: 248-250).

There is no mention of any such hallow for Elves, although by implication the burial places of Elvish kings and lords mentioned in *The Silmarillion* were treated in a similar way.[14] Elves probably regarded the whole of Middle-earth as holy and were prepared to worship under the open sky wherever they were. This would have been especially appropriate as their devotion was expressed in hymns and prayers to the stars and other celestial objects and any building would have obscured this.

However there are two buildings mentioned in *The Lord of the Rings* that are associated with Elvish religious rituals. First, the Hall of Fire at Rivendell which has already been mentioned. This was a place both for private thought and public celebration. Secondly, the tower, Elostirion, built by Gil-galad for Elendil for him to put a Palantír in (Sil: 292). The Palantír itself became a cause for pilgrimage.

Given the intense dislike of buildings for worship, the place and role of the Hall of Fire is not clear. It contained no images of any kind nor any cult object, only a fire there all the year round. It can only be assumed that such a building was not deemed to have contravened what was otherwise a strict prohibition.

Pilgrimage

Gildor's company was returning from a pilgrimage to look into the Palantír on Emyn Beraid when they met Frodo, Pippin and Sam.[15] This was a regular, if infrequent, event for the Noldorin exiles, especially those living in the area of Rivendell, it would have been a very difficult journey for any Noldo living in Lothlórien. On such a pilgrimage the pilgrim expected to see Eressëa and the Shores of Valinor and also hoped to have "a vision, clear but remote, of Elbereth, as a majestic figure, shining white, standing upon the mountain Oiolossë (Road: 74)." From the text of the hymn of the returning pilgrims, it seems that they had been granted such a vision, which may account for Gildor's comment about the Elves being little concerned with the ways of Hobbits, or of any other creature upon earth," and for immediately following this by saying "In this meeting there may be more than chance…(LotR I: 94)."

Conclusion

As Tolkien indicated, there is indeed much reference to religion in *The Lord of the Rings* although many of the references are not immediately clear. The Elves were monotheists with angelic intermediaries who were the focus of their devotions, intercessions, supplications and thanksgivings. They had a well-constructed ritual calendar which, both weekly and seasonally, provided them with rituals and festivals to enable them to focus their thoughts and to celebrate. The rituals that they followed, daily, weekly and seasonally, had a discernable pattern, although much is still obscure.

They also undertook pilgrimages upon which they hoped to have an "experience" of one of their angelic powers. They had no scriptures as understood by the term in Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition, but did have a large collection of poetry that was used for inspiration and reflection, rather like the great Viking and Hindu epics. Their leaders were leaders in both sacred and secular matters, in both war and peace and in festival and as repositories of lore.

They had a fully developed set of religious beliefs and practices similar in many ways to peoples in our world today, and it should not be thought otherwise.

Footnotes

1. Tolkien is careful to write that "they had no 'religion' (or religious practices, rather) for those had been in the hands of the gods (Letters: 204)."
2. They are also referred to as hymns in page 417 of the Index of *The Lord of the Rings,* but as songs in the text itself (LotR I: 88-89, 250, 393-394).
3. See also the conversation between Maedhros and Maglor (Sil: 2S3). The idea of not pronouncing the holy name of the deity is quite common, the best example in contemporary religion being in Judaism where the word "YHWH" is only ever pronounced "Adonai" rather than as it stands. One of the reasons was the thought in the ancient world that to say a word meant to give it life and power and that if the name of the deity was uttered and then misused or abused the consequences would be death for the utterer.
4. Celeborn and Thranduil met on the day of the New Year after Thranduil's victory over the forces of Sauron (LotR III: 375). As only one New Year of the Elves is ever mentioned in *The Lord of the Rings* it must be assumed that all Elf-centres celebrated it on the same day.
5. For example, Elrond after the feast celebrating the victory at the Ford of Bruinen "went to wards the seat prepared for him" in the Hall of Fire (LotR I: 242).
6. "…then they went down to the water to see the elves dance and sing upon the midsummer's eve (Hob: 53)."
7. For example, Aragorn and Arwen were be trothed on the eve of Midsummer (LotR III: 341) and were married on the day of Midsummer (ibid: 251).
8. This was undoubtedly the drink given to the travellers by Glorfindel (LotR I: 224), and used by Gandalf in cases of great need as when the Company were attempting the Redhorn Pass (ibid: 303-304). On none of these occasions was the miruvor used ritually, but it may have been made for ritual purposes.
9. The oath of Cirion and Eorl (UT: 304-305), which was renewed by Aragorn/Elessar with Éomer, using the same formula (ibid: 317; note 44).
10. This was on Midsummer (Sil: 190). Many Elf events took place on this day. They seem to have thought it auspicious.
11. "[he thought] he had received the gift of the Elf-minstrels, who can make the things of which they sing appear before the eyes of those who listen (LotR III: 338)."
12. For example, Legolas (LotR II: 31).
13. The word "thee" is also used by Gildor and company in addressing Elbereth. I do not know of any occasion of Elf usage of "thee" in personal conversation.
14. The burial place of Fingolfin and the burial place of Glorfindel (Sil: 154, 243). Both were buried in lonely, high places where flowers bloomed and were untouched by evil.
15. In pages 73-74 of *The Road Goes Ever On* it is stated that Gildor and company "live in or near Rivendell" but *The Lord of the Rings* (I: 89) seems to imply that they are on their way to visit their

The Healers of Gondor

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It is said that Estë, having perceived Melkor's designs to do harm to the creatures of Ilúvatar, took counsel with Yavanna and caused plants to grow that could heal and strengthen the body. Many of these herbs cause sleep, for Estë's gift to all is rest. Chief among these is asëa aranion, also called athelas, whose leaves, if crushed, carry the fragrance of the Blessed Isles. Estë also taught the use of herbs to the Elves who, in turn, taught Men. She granted the Edain the power to heal the illnesses of their kind, but not to prolong their lives beyond the time allotted them, as this would be contrary to the designs of Ilúvatar.

Healers and Númenor

In Númenor, before the coming of Ar-Pharazôn, the wisdom of the healers grew great, and their knowledge of the maladies of Men has not been equaled. Sadly, as the lifespans of men began to wane and doubt of the Valar grew (thanks in part to the machinations of Sauron), the Númenóreans became ever more obsessed with prolonging the span of their lives, and bent their efforts toward that end.

Only those faithful to the teachings of Estë sought to prevent the erosion of knowledge of the healing arts. Of the few that escaped the Drowning of Númenor with Elendil and his sons, only three were healers. These brought with them a chest which contained seeds of the plants used in healing and the few books that could be saved. Planted far and wide, the seeds that had been saved flourished, but the land from which they had come was gone forever.

Elendil, perceiving the danger of having only a few with knowledge of healing, directed that his sons and captains should learn what they could. Isildur mastered the craft quickest of all, and was reputed to possess the power to cure the sick and wounded with his hands.

Connection to the King

"The hands of the King are the hands of a healer, and so shall the rightful King ever be known." These words were spoken through the years by many in Gondor, but with little comprehension of their origin. Isildur's heirs and those of purer Dúnadan descent inherited within themselves the power to heal the sick, and to recall the spirit of those injured with evil weaponry.

After Sauron's defeat by Isildur, many of the injured seemed also to contract a dark malady that shadowed the heart and brought death more swiftly than seemed appropriate to their wounds. Swift use of asëa aranion could cure the afflicted, but only a few had the necessary skills to administer the remedy, and so less than half of the men taken ill by the "shadow sickness" (as it was called) were healed.

Foreseeing Gondor's need, Isildur decreed that each city should support a house of healing, where all who were ill might go. Such houses became an arm of the royal bureaucracy and received the favor of the King. The first of these houses was established in Osgiliath, where the books of the first healers from Númenor were kept in a place of honor.

It is interesting to note that as Kings of Gondor are also traditionally healers, connection to the Houses of Healing became a source of political legitimacy. Thus, even in the time of Castamir the Usurper (who bore little love for the institution), the Houses received support from the King and his court. Until the waning of Gondor in the Third Age (and prior to its rebirth in the Fourth), Gondorians believed that no one could be King who did not have "healing hands."

The Houses of Healing

Even though much of Gondor is governed by feudatories, the Houses of Healing in each city are agents of the King and governed only by his justice. Healers are also given the protection of the King's Guard and are escorted by them when traveling through dangerous places.

Monetary backing for the healers in each city comes in part from the King, in part from the nobility, and in part from teaching and offering for sale the common remedies needed in every household. Most often it will be found that the building used by the healers has itself been donated by a noble family with ties to the King.

Each house is governed by a Warden. In cities having more than one house, there is a Chief Warden of all the houses. Nominally, the head of all the houses is the King. This is demonstrated in the salutation used in correspondence, "By the grace of the Valar and of the King."

The Healing Vocation

Unlike many professions, people join the healers at different points in life. Some apprentice as children, but many seek to join when they are more advanced in years and have seen something of the world and practiced another trade. Often, soldiers who tire of killing and danger, or merely of the need to be forever watchful, renounce their swords and take the Healer's Oath. In addition, people who have acquired knowledge of cures and remedies will travel to a house to share and enlarge their wisdom.

Those who use magic to heal must be wary—trust of such things sways with the times and the nature of the Court. Among the great families of Gondor, elementary healing is taught alongside elementary swordsmanship in memory of Elendil and the refugees of Númenor.

Upon entering one of the houses as apprentice or journeyman healer, each person must take a simple oath, given to the head of the house in the city: *I swear by Estë and all the Valar that I will do all within my power to heal the sick and to preserve life. I swear that I will not raise my hand in violence, nor seek to cause another harm. I will serve my King by healing his people and preserving the knowledge I have been given.* Upon taking the oath, the speaker puts on the white or pale blue robes that mark the healers in Gondor.

Occasionally, when other duties call, a person may be released from the oath and is allowed to return and take the oath again when his duties are finished. It is extremely rare for a healer to break the oath. It is also difficult for an inherently evil person to pretend to be a healer, as most healers cultivate goodness and are able see its absence in the form of a shadow clinging to the body.

A Count of the Khazad

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This article presents my idea of the early population history of the Dwarves. Unlike Jason Beresford's and Gunnar Brolin's articles on human populations in earlier issues of **Other Hands** *[3: 4-10; 4: 22-23], it does not use any scientific or historical methodology to arrive at its conclusions. I feel that calculating the population of a Dwarven culture by using average population densities would be impossible anyway. It is rather my own extrapolations from the little information thatJ.R.R. Tolkien himself has written on these matters. I admittedly have "cooked" the numbers in order to get the results I wanted (e.g., that ofDurin's Folk at their peak). Readers may use or dismiss my efforts as they wish. To my knowledge nothing in this article contradicts Tolkien's writings, and where my opinion differs from that of ICE, I have made note of it.*

The creation of the Dwarves by Aulë and their adoption by Eru is told in Chapter Two of *The Silmarillion*. In *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien* (page 287), we learn that there were only thirteen original Dwarves: Durin and six other pairs of males and females. If this is true, then why were there seven Houses of Dwarves rather than six? Also, how could Durin have been the ancestor of all the Kings of the Longbeards (Hobbit: 63)?

My solution is as follows. Although the Dwarves were laid in far-sundered places during their long slumber, I believe that when they were finally allowed to awaken, they were reunited in one place. When this occurred, the preeminence of Durin, being both the oldest and Alone, must have been recognized. This preeminence was still honored well into the Third Age, as indicated by the War of the Dwarves and the Orcs in "Appendix A" (RotK: 352-357).

In addition, my interpretation of the opening paragraphs of the section is that all the Dwarven Houses originally lived in or near Khazad-dûm. To quote directly, Tolkien writes that Durin at "the awakening of that people…came to Azanulbizar, and in the caves above Kheled-zâram he made his dwelling, where afterwards were the Mines of Moria renowned in song (ibid: 352)."

During these early years, I believe it was highly probable that Durin performed for the Dwarves many of the functions that Michael Hickman ascribes to Dúnadan monarchs *(OH* 8: 7). This would have continued until the later sundering of the Houses, when each ruling heir would have received this honor. Tolkien also tells us that Durin was granted a lifespan much longer than that of any other Dwarf, and was thereby known as Durin the Deathless. As the children of the other six pairs of Dwarves reached maturity, they may have begun to see which could wed their daughter to Durin.

Such a union would have enhanced the prestige of die successful House well above that of the others. Dissent between the Houses at such an early stage would have been disastrous for the Dwarves. Therefore, I propose that Durin (perhaps with Aule's guidance) decided to wed a daughter of each of the six other couples. In addition to settling any dissension, this would have established Durin's line not only as the largest House, but also the one in which ran the blood of all seven of the fathers of the Dwarves. This was probably the only case of sanctioned polygamy in Dwarven history (although I have heard rumors that among some of the eastern Dwarves the women sometimes take more than one husband).

It is also my opinion that during these critical, early years, the birthrate for Dwarves would have been quite a bit higher than in later ages. In fact, I propose that each and every Dwarven woman for the first seven generations had (Surprise!) exactly seven children. This was, of course, a supernatural event brought about by the workings of Aulë and/or Eru. These seven generations of births also would have coincided with the lifetime of Durin I.

Much intermarriage occurred between the Houses during the time of these first generations. It would have had to, because of the initially small number of Dwarves. As seen on the table at the end of this article, of the seven children born to each of the original six pairs, four were male and three female. Succeeding generations all had the normal ratio for Dwarves of two males born for every female. Because of this, even with seven children born to each female, the population grew relatively slowly.

After the birth of the eighth generation and Durin's death, the Houses began to sunder. The Dwarves must have realized they had lost the one individual who could communicate with Aulë (or "Mahal", as he was known to them) on a regular and direct basis. It was also at this time that the birthrate among the Dwarves began to decline. I have it dropping by about half a child for each successive generation (see table below).

This rate of decline continued until the fifteenth generation (which was the fourteenth actually born in Middle-earth), at which point it stabilized at an average of three and one third children for each married Dwarf woman. The unwillingness of all Dwarven women to take a husband which Tolkien mentions also began with the eighth generation, or at least marriage was no longer required regardless of their wishes.[1]

Another important question is the number of years between the birth of each generation of Dwarves. Again, the best source of information to answer this question is "Appendix

A." On the chart showing the Line of the Dwarves of Erebor (RotK: 361), each Dwarf listed fathered a child at the age of about a hundred, and lived (unless they met an unnatural death) to about two hundred and fifty. Although this is a royal line, I see no reason why this would not be typical for all Dwarves. Certainly, if two hundred and fifty is the upper age limit for Dwarves of a royal line, other Dwarves would not live much beyond this.[2]

In Chapter Ten of *The Silmarillion,* we find that Dwarves first came to Beleriand during the second age of the captivity of Melkor (page 91). My interpretation of this passage is that it seems the Dwarves had actually been living in the Blue Mountains for sometime before the Sindar discovered them, which leads me to believe that the awakening of the first Dwarves occurred sometime during the first half of the first age of Melkor's captivity. A time soon after the arrival of the Eldar in Valinor seems the most likely.

This would mean that the fifteenth peneration of Dwarves was born sometime near the middle of the second age of Melkor's captivity. Dwarven numbers would reach their peak two centuries after this and remain stable until the return of Melkor more than a thousand years later. This event began the slow decline of the Naugrim, and while Khazad-dfim would still increase in numbers after Morgoth's fall due to the influx of refugees from the Blue Mountains, the springtime of the Dwarves had already past.

Footnotes

1. I would like to point out that the conception rate for Dwarves given on the table in *Rolemasar Companion I* is unrealistically low. Were it accurate, Dwarves would probably have been extinct long before the Third Age.
2. I therefore disagree with the four hundred year lifespan for Dwarves listed in ICE's description of the race.

Dwarven Census by Generation

After the seventh generation, there would be a wider natural variance in the numbers than what I have shown here. Presenting them as I have done, calculated out to the last digit, is therefore probably misleading in terms of accuracy, but the numbers provided do give a good average (On the other hand, since this is my creation, I suppose I can be as accurate as I choose.). The table also shows the importance an extra wife or two in an early generation can have in affecting the final population of a House.

After the fifteenth generation, all generations would be more or less the same size until the minions of Melkor became active. Even then because of the fact that Dwarven women would seldom go abroad, the long-term population would not be affected unless a Dwarven mansion was lost. Since a Dwarven generation is 100 years in length with a typical lifespan of 200 years, one can determine the approximate number of total (living) Dwarves of a House by taking the figures given by the fifteenth generation and multiplying by 2.S. For example, the total numbers for Dunn's Folk would be 108615 (72410 males and 3620S females, 32S8S of these latter being wives). I would like to add that I agree with the idea to which some of ICE's writers have alluded: that not all of Dunn's Folk dwelt in Khazad-dum at its peak. To discuss this, however, would entail another article.

Table Legend

Roman numerals = Dwarven Houses [House I = Durin's Folk]
Total born = number of Dwarves born to the wives of each House
Wives = number of Dwarven women women who married Dwarven men of each House
Birth rate = average number of children born to each wife [subsequent to the 15th generation, the birth rate remains stable at 3.3]

1st gen	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
Males	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Females	0	1	1	1	1	1	1
Wives	0	1	1	1	1	1	1

2nd gen	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
Total births	0	7	7	7	7	7	7
[male]	0	4	4	4	4	4	4
[female]	0	3	3	3	3	3	3
Wives	6	2	2	2	2	2	2
Birthrate = 7.0							

3rd gen	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
Total births	42	14	14	14	14	14	14
[male]	28	10	9	10	9	10	9
[female]	14	4	5	4	5	4	5
Wives	14	4	5	4	5	4	s
Birthrate = 7.0							

4th gen	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
Total births	98	28	35	28	35	28	35
[male]	65	19	23	18	24	19	23
[female]	33	9	12	10	11	9	12
Wives	33	10	11	10	11	10	11
Birthrate = 7.0							

5th gen	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
Total births	231	70	77	70	77	70	77
[male]	154	47	51	46	52	47	51
[female]	77	23	26	24	25	23	26
Wives	77	23	26	24	25	23	26
Birthrate = 7.0							

6th gen	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
Total births	539	161	182	168	175	161	182
[male]	359	107	122	112	117	108	121
[female]	180	54	60	56	58	53	61
Wives	180	54	60	56	58	53	61
Birthrate = 7.0							

7 th gen	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
Total births	1260	378	420	392	406	371	427
[male]	840	252	280	261	271	247	285
[female]	420	126	140	131	135	124	142
Wives	420	126	140	131	135	124	142
Birthrate = 7.0							

8 th gen	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
Total births	2940	882	980	917	945	868	994
[male]	1960	588	653	611	630	579	663
[female]	980	294	327	306	315	289	331
Wives	882	265	294	275	284	260	298
Birth rate = 6.5							

9th gen	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
Total births	5733	1723	1911	1787	1846	1690	1937
[male]	3822	1149	1274	1191	1231	1127	1291
[female]	1911	574	637	596	615	563	646
Wives	1720	517	573	536	554	507	581
Birth rate = 6.0							

10th gen	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
Total births	10320	3102	3438	3216	3324	3042	3486
[male]	6880	2068	2292	2144	2216	2028	2324
[female]	3440	1034	1146	1072	1108	1014	1162
Wives	7662	2304	2552	2388	2468	2261	2589
Birth rate = 5.5							

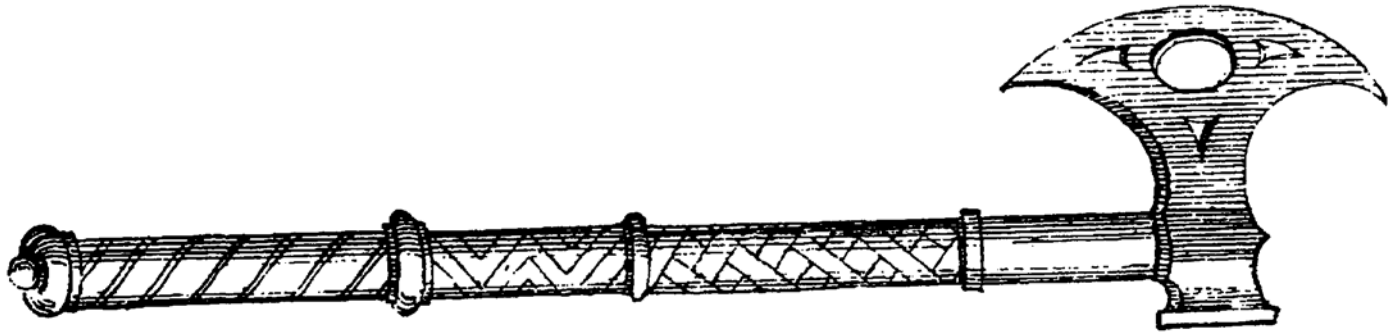
11 th gen	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
Total births	17028	5121	5671	5308	5484	5022	5753
[male]	11352	3414	3781	3539	3656	3348	3835
[female]	5676	1707	1890	1769	1828	1670	1918
Wives	5108	1536	1701	1592	1645	1507	1726
Birth rate = 5.0							

12th gen	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
Total births	25540	7680	8505	7960	8225	7535	8630
[male]	17027	5120	5670	5307	5483	5023	5753
[female]	8513	2560	2835	2653	2742	2512	2877
Wives	7662	2304	2552	2388	2468	2261	2589
Birth rate = 4.5							

13th gen	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
Total births	34479	10368	11484	10746	11106	10175	11651
[male]	22986	6912	7656	7164	7404	6783	7767
[female]	11493	3456	3828	3582	7020	3392	3884
Wives	10344	3110	3445	3224	3332	3053	3496
Birth rate = 4.0							

14th gen	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
Total births	41376	12440	13780	12896	13328	12212	13894
[male]	27584	8293	3187	8597	8885	8141	9323
[female]	13792	4147	4593	4299	4443	4071	4661
Wives	12413	3732	4134	3869	3999	3664	4195
Birthrate =3.5							

15th gen	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
Total births	43446	13026	14469	13542	13997	12824	14683
[male]	28964	8708	9646	9028	9331	8549	9789
[female]	14482	4354	5823	4514	4666	4275	4894
Wives	13034	3919	4341	4063	4199	3848	4405
Birthrate =3.3							



Family Business

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This is a short adventure designed to send the characters on a romp through Gondor's rural backwaters. It can take place at any time in Gondor's history. Numbers and weapon skill are not crucial; cleverness is a stronger asset. The only prerequisites are that the characters must own at least one horse, that they must end a day's travel through Lamedon in the middle of nowhere, with no inn as far as the eye can see, and that they must look and act peaceful enough to be admitted to the home of an average farmer (which is where they enter the plot).

Lamedonrim Culture

The people of Lamedon are of Daen stock, although in most respects they have been culturally integrated into Gondor for several centuries. They are rugged, down-to-earth, and mainly concerned about the practicalities of life. There are, however, certain aspects of life which the Lamedonrim take especially seriously: control of one's flock and control of one's family.

The sheep and goats of the Lamedonrim are ear-marked to show who owns them, but the lambing season presents the opportunity to steal other people's lambs before they are marked. This is a favorite sport among the young men, and enables them to prove their doughtiness to their elders. It also leads to a certain amount of quarreling between landholders, although vendettas no longer rage in Lamedon since Gondorian law put a damper on the Lamedonrim temper.

To avoid intricate sub-divisions of the family land, the Lamedonrim practice an inheritance system in which the eldest son of each family gets the right to the land, employing his brothers and men from poorer families to help with the flocks in exchange for shares of the produce. A man may leave the family land with his share of the flock, but this is uncommon since a flock cannot be kept without land to graze upon. Few rural Lamedonrim would be prepared to sell their sheep and do something else for a living.

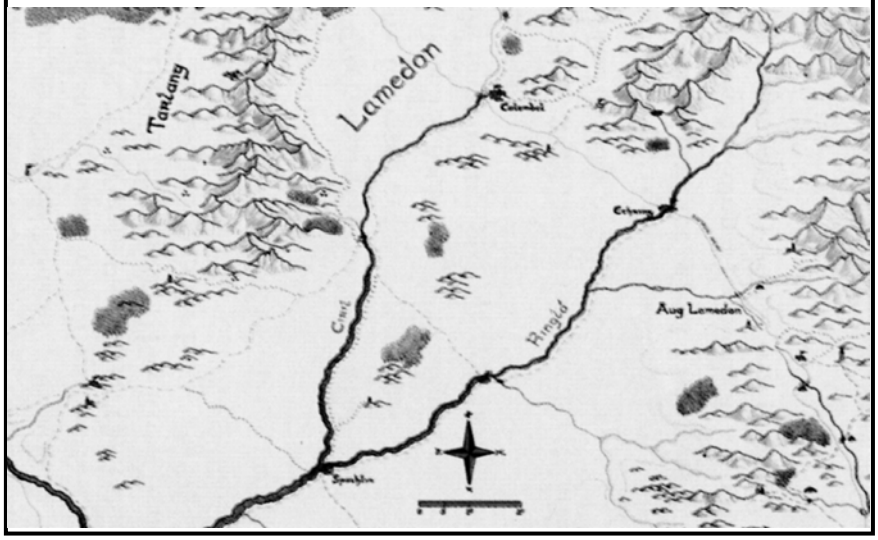
The inheritance system and the need for assistance with the flocks lend a very strong importance to marriages between the landholding families. Alliances of trust and of property are forged through marrying one's children to well-chosen spouses. This, however, is a perennial source of frustration to young people who have other things in mind than strategic pasture management. When all else fails, a nubile maiden may be abducted by her beloved, whereupon the young couple is invariably pursued the length of the land by the woman's brothers. The traditional resolution of these dramas is that the young couple stays in hiding until the woman is pregnant, after which her father is confronted with *a fait accompli,* and a hopefully acceptable bride price. He rarely refuses it.

A Tale of Star-crossed Lovers

Edla is the younger daughter of Eskil and Virnia, Lamedonrim farmers whose homestead lies a few miles of the River Ciril. Edla is tall and skinny, with glittering brown eyes in a plain face framed in chestnut hair. She is in her early twenties, and thus eligible for marriage. Her father has consequently negotiated a marriage for Edla with Wilfer, the eldest son of Eskil's southern neighbor, Brakas.

The trouble is that Edla does not like the dour and uncouth Wilfer. Several years of brief, clandestine meetings with Adrin Enarion have instead convinced her that he would make a good husband. Unfortunately, all Adrin can hope for is a meager co-ownership of his family's rather measly property, and this makes him a less than splendid candidate from Eskil's point of view. Eskil has

Map of Lamedon



Northwestern Middle-earth Map Set #7; reprinted with permission

put his boot-heel down on Edla's hints, but she is a stubborn person, and this is a very important matter to her.

Adrin is the youngest of four brothers, and about Edla's age. He is a thoughtful young man who spends a lot of time musing while the sheep dogs do his work. He is not exactly dashing, but handsome enough, clean-shaven with an unruly mop of black hair and blue eyes. He completely agrees with Edla about whom she should marry. He has actually asked his father, Enar, to discuss the matter with Eskil, but Enar has refused on the grounds that Eskil's answer would be all too predictable.

Hallas Benokion, son of a neighboring farmer, has been Adrin's friend ever since the first childhood afternoon they spent sorting out their mixed-up flocks, and now Hallas has volunteered to help Adrin and Edla consummate their love by pulling the old abduction trick.

Enter the Characters

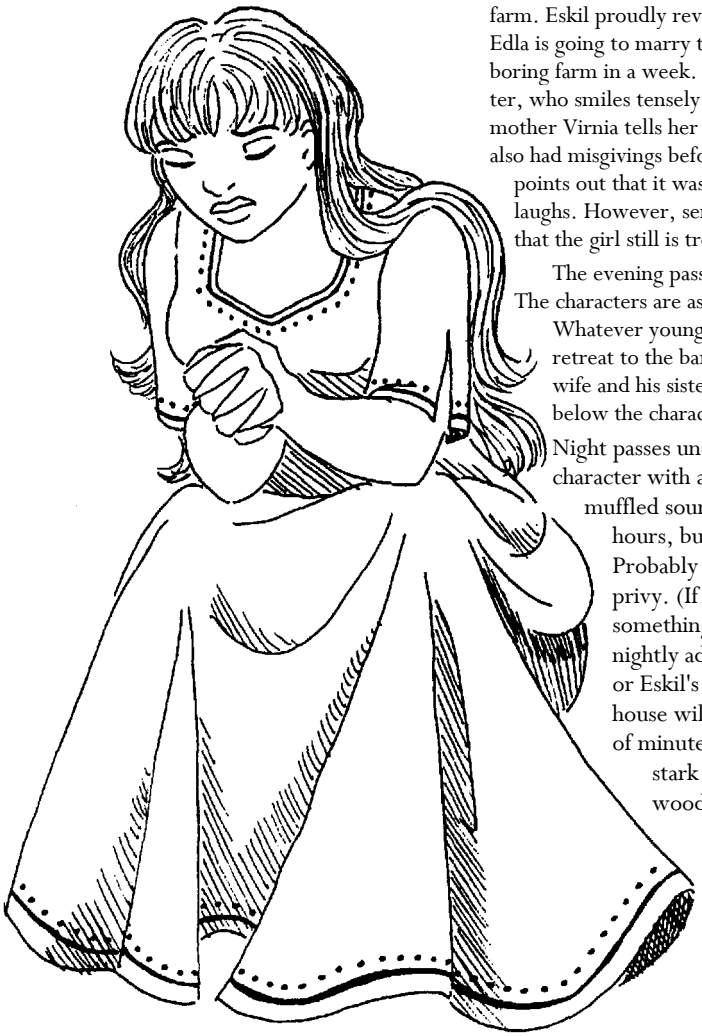
The characters are traveling through Lamedon. It is near nightfall, and the last inn is three miles back. Inn or no, the party needs night lodgings, and over a crest in the road an inviting farm turns up. It might do.

When the characters dismount, a man comes out of the house. It is the owner, a middle-aged farmer named Eskil, and he asks the party's business. After some haggling he agrees to house and feed the characters and their horses for about half of what it would have cost at an inn. If the characters look poor, he asks to be paid in advance.

Eskil's is a typical Lamedonrim family farm, and the description also fits the neighboring farms of Enar, Benok and Brakas pretty well. The farms lie a mile or so apart. The only atypical characteristic of Eskil's farm is that it is not located near the river; instead, it happens to be near the point on a road where the characters decide that they need to find lodgings for the night.

The main building is a U-shaped, single story stone house with a thatched roof. The living quarters are in the left wing. The central part houses a stable with two mules, a cart and tool shed, and the right wing is used for storing fodder and wool. Other buildings include a dairy shed, a chicken coop and a privy. If the river turns out to be distant, a well is found between the wings of the main building. Near the houses are several large pens used for the shearing of sheep and goats, which takes place in the spring. A couple of fenced fields of modest proportions can be seen some way off.

Most of the living-space in the farmhouse is taken up by a single large room, with a big hearth at one end (the mules are on the other side of the wall). Built-in benches around the walls double as beds, and a large table surrounded with wooden stools occupies the middle of the room. At the other end of the room are found the doors to the master bedroom and the larder (locked). Odds and ends of everyday life are stored under the benches and hang from hooks in the not-too-lofty ceiling. Two looms flank the table. Outdoor clothes are hung on pegs in the wall to both sides of the entrance. A ladder on the wall opposite the entrance leads through a hole in the ceiling to the attic.



The stable has room for three horses beside Eskil's mules, and the rest are put in a corral near the house. (Saddles and harness are most likely put in the stable, but an interesting question is where the saddle-bags end up. Try to establish this without alerting the characters' suspicions-one method is to simply inform them that "saddles, saddle-bags and harness are left in the stable," hoping that they will not contradict you. Anyway, they will not be able to bring the horses into the house.)

Inside, the characters are served mutton stew, coarse bread, white cheese and goat's milk, and Eskil and the women of his family encourage them to tell stories of their travels. Most of the year, all of the young men are out with the flocks, and will not be present at the farm. Eskil proudly reveals that his daughter Edla is going to marry the heir of the neighboring farm in a week. He beams at his daughter, who smiles tensely and eats little. Her mother Virnia tells her comfortingly that she also had misgivings before she married Eskil, but points out that it was not so bad. Everyone laughs. However, sensitive characters note that the girl still is troubled.

The evening passes, and bedtime arrives. The characters are assigned bunks in the attic. Whatever young men may be present retreat to the barn, but the eldest son, his wife and his sister sleep in the main room below the characters.

Night passes uneventfully. A cautious character with acute hearing might hear muffled sounds in the darkest hours, but nothing alarming. Probably just someone off to the privy. (If a character tries something stupid, like making nightly advances on the daughter or Eskil's possessions, the whole house will be awake in a matter of minutes and Eskil will appear stark naked, swinging a wood-axe over his head. But that is a different adventure, which is left to the improvising skills of the gamemaster.)

The Morning After

The characters are wakened in the early morning by agitated voices, above which can be heard an apparently outraged Eskil bawling: "The damn girl! Oh, when I get hold of her! Damn!"

Bedraggled characters stumble down the ladder and confront the family. Eskil tries to explain, now and then pausing for an outburst of curses, that his daughter has apparently chosen to elope during the night on the back of one of the characters' horses! To boot, she seems to have rummaged in the saddle-bags, if they happened to be in the stable. If so, she will have taken dried food, small amounts of money, and any pretty baubles that adventurers might possess.

While the characters eat their breakfast and adapt to the new situation, Eskil rages and behavior, but begs the charactersVirnia tries to placate her guests. She is visibly deeply shamed Virnia tries to placate her guests. She is visibly deeply shamed over her daughter's outrageous

over her daughter's outrageous behavior, but begs the characters not to take any hasty action; Edla will surely be back soon with what she has stolen. Her brothers will find her, it will not be hard since everyone knows the reason for her disappearance.

Edla has often spoken with enthusiasm of Adrin, a son of one of the neighboring families. He, however, is not a good match. Edla is scheduled to marry a fine young man in a week's time, but she has shown by all means that she does not like the prospect. She must certainly have run off with Adrin somewhere, and it will not take a minute to find them.

At worst, the wedding will have to be postponed for a week, but Edla's future husband does not have to learn the exact reason for this. Virnia earnestly begs the characters to have mercy since the future happiness of her admittedly shameless daughter is at stake.

Adrin turns out not to have left his home the crucial night, and no trace of Edla can be found linking him to the outrageous act of disrespect. Actually, his friend Hallas has escorted the young lady to a shepherd's hut where Adrin can join her as soon as the coast is clear.

The characters may (with a bit of sleuthing) be able to find out what has happened, and reach the young couple just as they are assaulted by the girl's brothers. At this point the characters have to choose sides in the family conflict and try to get their stolen possessions back. Their motivation for meddling in family business is the fact that some of their valuable equipment is on the run without them. This particular chase is intended to force the characters to take the scenic route through Lamedon, which they might otherwise miss.

Confronting the Suspect

When the characters have eaten and dressed, Eskil calms down a bit. He soberly admits that what has happened is an outrage, and refuses to accept payment for food and lodgings. (Any advance payment is returned.) Eskil invites the characters to join him in fetching his daughter, although they may stay loafing about the farm if they choose.

Eskil puts a crude saddle on one of the mules and rides off north to Enar's farm, where he raises a scene and demands that he be allowed to search the premises. Old Enar is completely ignorant of the youngsters' scheme, and is thus first dumbfounded; gradually, however, he grows angry as Eskil stomps about his farm.

Adrin's alibi is that he has been at the farm with his whole family throughout the previous night. Eskil shouts at him and tries to give him a beating, but is prevented by Adrin's older brothers. If the characters came along to Enar's, they might involve themselves in the proceedings, or they might just stand around and watch the fireworks. In the end, Eskil begins to suspect that he might have jumped to the wrong conclusion. He sheepishly apologizes to the bristling Enar and rides off home after one last piercing glance at Adrin, who for some reason looks pained and worried.

The Search

Back at his farm, Eskil proceeds to call his sons—Pickor, Erling, and Joar—back home with the flocks, intending to send them out to search for Edla. Eskil plainly states to the characters that he intends to compensate them for the stolen property; but that he has not got a lot of money at the moment. His suggestion is that they stay at the farm for a couple of days until Edla and the stolen goods are found, or (at worst) so he might be given time to borrow enough money.

No self-respecting adventurer will spend these days just waiting for the stuff to reappear. The characters will most probably begin an investigation of their own, while Eskil's sons also do what they can to find their delinquent sister. (The characters might even join forces with the brothers.) The characters will be one short in mounts, but may borrow one of Eskil's mules as long as he does not get the impression that they intend to keep it and never come back.

With a bit of questioning, the characters may learn what is common knowledge: that Adrin's best friend is named Hallas Benokion, where Benok's farm is, that Wilfer Brakasion is indeed rich but not a particularly nice guy, and that there are lots of folk-tales about young people eloping rather than marrying according to the wishes of their parents.

Exactly what they will learn depends on what they ask, and the gamemaster has to dish out a fair bit of irrelevant information. Apart from the easy pickings, the potential sources of information are Adrin himself, and his talkative, six-year-old niece Pilva.

Privately, Adrin is unpleasantly surprised that Edla and Hallas stole the characters' horse, since this involves strangers and might send them all to jail. He will not confide in the characters, but might be tailed the night after Eskil's loud-mouthed visit, as he rides up to the shepherd's hut to confer with Hallas and Edla (which will be very hard for anyone without Elven-sight or an intimate knowledge of the area).

Pilva has overheard a conversation between Adrin and Hallas, and knows that Edla is probably "up in Benok's sheep-shack on the mountain." This she will lispingly divulge only to a sympathetic character who takes the time to ask properly.

Hallas' own family knows that Hallas is up to something, since he has borrowed a mule

and made some strange comings and goings. However, they do not know what he has been doing. This they will tell to characters who identify themselves, establish some kind of trust with them, and ask for the young man.

Depending on the season, Hallas will most probably visit his home only briefly, hurrying back to his sheep when Adrin and Edla are installed at the hut. He will not tell the characters anything, but will ask them a lot of questions to ascertain their intentions. (This inquisitiveness might strike the characters as suspicious.)

A good tracker may be able to follow the stolen horse's tracks a bit from Eskil's farm, and will perceive that Edla was accompanied by another rider when she left. The tracks point roughly north, but not the way one would choose if one were heading for Enar's farm. (They point more or less towards the shepherd's hut, but cannot be followed for very long. The horse is kept next to the hut out of view from the valley, but the telltale wisp of smoke from the fireplace of a shepherd's hut with no sign of any sheep around it may appear conspicuous. The main obstacle to the investigation is simply that the characters most probably are strangers without knowledge of the land-"Benok's sheep shack" might be any one of ten shacks a mile apart.)

If, along the way, the characters should become soft-hearted at the predicament of the two young lovers, complete success will not only be a question of regaining stolen property, but also of somehow relieving the tension of the age-old family drama. Characters who look for a happy ending must understand that Edla will have an extremely hard time once she is marked in the common mind as a horse-thief. (This fact may complicate their investigations, since they will not be able to tell their informers exactly why they are asking questions.)

La Grande Finale

Benok's shack is one of the innumerable simple huts that accommodate Lamedonrim shepherds out with the flocks. It is located in a high meadow on Hallas' father's land. The hut is not likely to be visited for at least the time it takes to get Edla pregnant (which is why Hallas chose it for his friends). Depending on the season the meadow might either be newly grazed by goats or just plain withered. The hut is an unfurnished, single-room stone structure with a sod-roof. The hut is reached on a narrow goat-path just level enough to permit the passage of a horse.

Adrin joins Edla and Hallas at the shepherd's hut the night after Edla's escape. The three of them have a heated argument about the horse-theft and its implications, but can find no sensible course of action. Hallas leaves before dawn, returning Adrin's mule to Enar's stable. Edla and Adrin are in low spirits but see no other possibility than to keep the horse and follow their initial plan of consummating their marriage in advance.

The characters will probably find them in a couple of days, either by themselves or in the company of Edla's brothers. If the characters have searched on their own, the brothers may conveniently find the hut only a short while after them, thus creating an interesting situation.

No matter who finds them first, Edla and Adrin will panic. Unless the pursuers are very careful, they will be noticed in advance, and their quarry will try to escape. Since the only sensible escape route is down the path, it will take some mighty fancy footwork from Edla and Adrin on the stolen horse to get past the approaching danger. They simply will not make it.

Pickor, Erling and Joar want to seize their sister and beat Adrin up thoroughly. Adrin wants to get out of the nasty situation, preferably together with Edla. Edla too wants to get out, but since it does not seem very likely that she will, she may threaten to kill herself with a knife.

Neither Adrin nor the three brothers wear armor, but all wield hooked shepherds' staffs with some precision. The characters must understand that Pickor, Erling and Joar are ordinary and pretty nice Lamedonrim men acting according to grim tradition, hence it would not be a good solution for any armed characters to hack them down. (Pickor even has a pregnant wife.)

If the characters simply stand back, an unpleasant stalemate will ensue, with Edla pointing a knife at her chest, Adrin lying beaten on the ground, and the three brothers unsure of what to do or of how seriously to take Edla's threat. But, since characters rarely do stand back, almost anything might happen. The ending will be up to their wits and intuition.

Possible Outcomes

Solutions might include a famous and/or wealthy character tangibly blessing the union between Edla and Adrin, thereby compensating somewhat for Adrin's meager economic means or at least putting a weight of outsider prestige behind the match. If the characters are to effect a happy ending, they will have to face and convince Eskil, a situation which may inspire some good role-playing.

At best, the characters might continue their travels with all their stuff, leaving behind them the happily married Edla and Adrin somehow reconciled with Edla's family. (This would provide the characters with a set of loyal friends in Lamedon who may come in handy in future adventures.)

If the characters cannot find the young couple (and the gamemaster feels that they have had their share of gentle nudges in the right direction), Pickor, Erling and Joar return one evening to the farm with Edla, the horse and any of the characters possessions that were stolen. Edla is bruised and apathetic, and the brothers curtly explain that Adrin was the culprit but that he will be no nuisance in the near future (which is correct, if Adrin lies unconscious outside the shepherd's hut with a lot of broken bones). Edla will be married to Wilfer, unless word spreads of what has passed (in which case she will never be married at all, and the adventure ends on a note of despair).

From a practical point of view, one might conclude that this means the characters might as well lay back from the start and wait for their stuff to return, but this they cannot know in advance. Anyway, descriptions of Edla's bitter fate will make them feel their failure.

The Miller's Tale

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This adventure begins with a series of events that take place before the characters even get involved. They'll literally stumble upon the plot and quickly get caught up in something dark and nasty before they realize it. The characters can enter the scenario in a variety of ways. They could be traveling along the river bank and spot Isanar's body. Or they could be asked by an officer of the realm to investigate the death ofElanir Banair. Shadier characters might be friends of Isanar and want to find out about his death.

The Tale of Otell Edlin

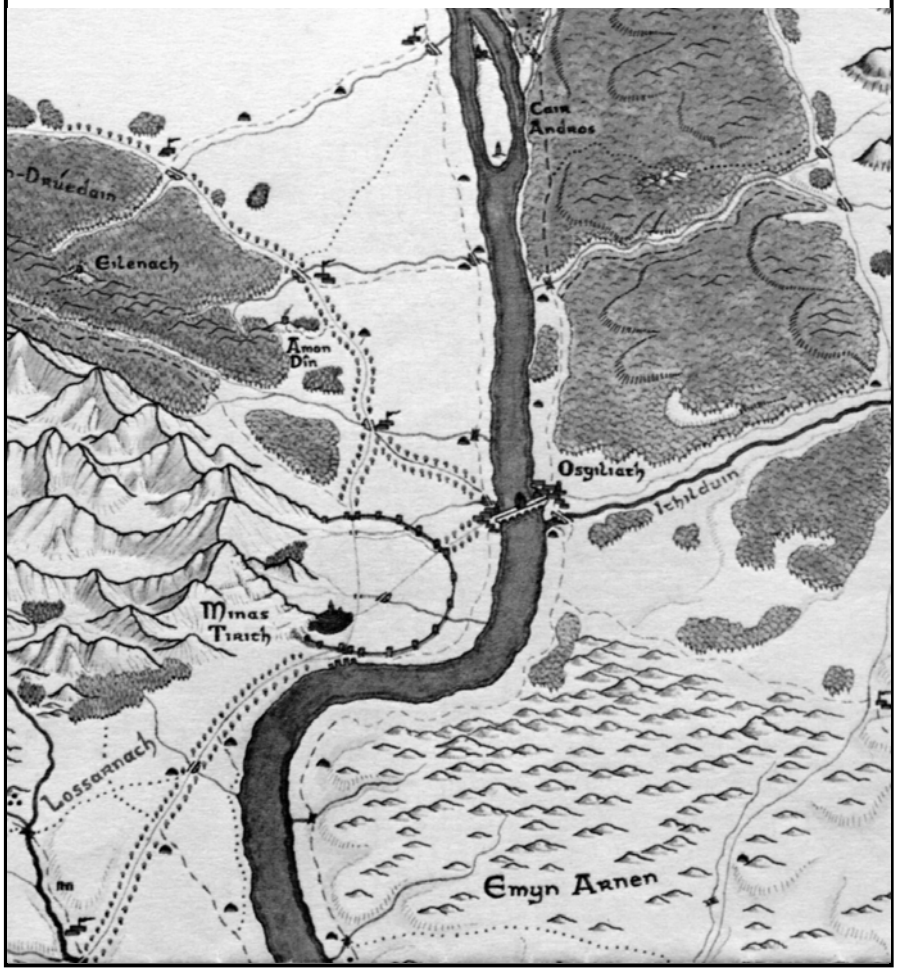
Ever since the Great Plague struck the city of Minas Tirith some 500 years ago, there have been minor recurrences of the disease from time to time. This last summer, such an outbreak occurred on the estate of Lord Lothis Banair, a minor noble in service to King Eärnil II. Lothis' main source of income is his crops of wheat, which he sells to the Baker's Guild of Minas Tirith.

The outbreak was relatively small, but it struck down several of the freemen who worked for Lothis in his wheat fields. As a result, Lothis was not able to raise the bumper crop he had counted on. His contract for the year 2031 had him selling his goods to a miller named Otell Edlin. Otell is unremarkable in looks, except that he is a large and strong man. Lothis sold his small batch of wheat to Otell at a price still within the range set by the Guild, but it was definitely a much higher price than normal. Lothis, after all, still had to have his same share of profit despite his poor crop. Otell protested this charge, but it was approved by the Guild as within the terms of the original contract.

Otell, already a hot-tempered, impetuous man, was infuriated by Lothis' actions and the consent of the Guild. Worse, he owed a significant debt to a ruthless underworld figure named Corlan Larethan, who lives in Linhir. It was only a matter of time before Corlan's men would try to collect the debt, or Otell's head. Otell had to get the money somehow. Perhaps foolishly, he desired revenge on the greedy Lothis.

Otell knew that Minas Tirith also had its share of ne'er do wells. Through one of the

Minas Tirith and environs



Northwestern Middle-earth Map Set #8; reprinted with permission

barmaids at the Old Guesthouse by the name of Karlana, he contacted a young thief named Isanar Archin. In addition to his handsome, rakish looks, Isanar had a good reputation as a cautious and nimble burglar, though he himself was quick to point out that he was not an assassin. Otell hired Isanar to go to Lord Lothis' estate and steal one of his prized possessions, a large and unusual rock of unknown origin. Lothis found it while traveling some months ago.

Lothis' rock is an interesting thing. It is of a black substance never before seen by scholars in Minas Tirith and is deemed to be valuable, mostly because of its beauty. It is very hard, with flecks of crystal throughout. Lothis keeps it on display and is very proud of it. In reality, the rock could be a number of things: a meteorite, a bit of waste or a byproduct from a magical experiment, or even just an extremely rare geological formation. Whatever the rock is, it innately brings 5D6 unluck to the current owner, for somewhere in its past, the rock has been cursed. The rock is the source of Lothis' bad crop, and sadly enough, the death of his daughter (see below).

Isanar agreed to the task for a reasonable sum. The two agreed to meet outside of Minas Tirith for the exchange, at a weeping willow bank where the river Anduin turned south, in two days time. The next night, Isanar made the trip to Lothis' estate and snuck into the house with relative ease. The rock was on plain display at the top of a large stairway on the second floor. Isanar was getting ready to leave when out of nowhere came Lady Elanir, Lothis' 17 year-old daughter. Before she could scream, Isanar grabbed her—truly intending only to knock her unconscious and leave—but Elanir struggled with him and, in a tragic mishap, fell down the stairs and was killed.

Isanar, who had tried to save the girl, was horrified and he fled at once. As he ran, Elanir's maid, coming to see why her mistress had arisen, caught a glimpse of him fleeing. Her shouts brought the house down, and Isanar escaped by the skin of his teeth, out the open kitchen window. Isanar managed to hide himself until the next day, when he was to meet with Otell.

Word of the murder and robbery spread rapidly. Isanar was panicky, and so was Otell when they met. Isanar urged Otell to take the rock and flee; he told Otell that he'd never be able to sell it in Minas Tirith, and that he had no desire to be hung for a young girl's death that he was innocent of.

Otell saw that Isanar would likely blab the entire story to save his skin, so in a surprise move, he strangled the thief (leaving some fine flour dust on Isanar's body), threw him up into one of the willow trees (the closest place he saw to hide the body), took the rock, and fled.

Quickly, he made two purchases: a strong box and a heavy chain. Going back to the river, he placed the rock in the box and sank it in a spot about a mile from where Isanar's body was hidden. For the moment, Otell breathed a sigh of relief. True, he couldn't sell the rock in Minas Tirith, but perhaps Corlan would take it as payment. It might even be sellable in Pelargir or Dol Amroth, both of which were relatively easy journeys from the city. Otell was making his plans when a visitor called.

It was Setrian Rolnmir, one of the more prestigious members of the Baker's Guild. Setrian is tall and good-looking, the picture of respectability. Having observed Otell's shady activities in the past (including his dealings with Isanar), Setrian was intrigued when he noticed Otell purchasing a box and chain in the marketplace.

Setrian was very clever and, recalling the animosity between Otell and Lothis, is reasonably sure Otell now has the rock, since he was obviously looking for a way to "sink" something of value with the box and chain. News of the robbery and the death of Lothis' daughter is already major news in the city.

Setrian could care less about the rock; what he is interested in is buying flour at a reduced cost. He suggests that Otell continue selling him flour at the rate shown in the books but actually taking 25% less money. Otell seethes, but there is little he can do. In exchange for this reduction in cost, Setrian vows to keep word of Otell's shady dealings private. Otell fears Setrian's influence in the Guild, so he agrees, not being a particularly clever man.

Rough Timeline

Week One: Lothis overcharges Otell.

Week Three:

Day

1 Otell meets with Isanar and sets up the deal

3 Insanar sneakds to Lord Lothis's keep, stealing the rock. Elanir dies

4 Otell and Isanar meet during the late afternoon. Otell kills Isanar and takes the rock.

5 Otell buys the box and chain early in the morning, hiding the rock in the river.

6 Setrian puts his facts together and visits Otell, blackmailing him.

8 Corlan arrives to harass Otell. They go to the river for the rock. If it is there, Otell dies and Corlan takes the rock. If it is not there, Otell is given three days to find it. He'll go to Setrian for help.

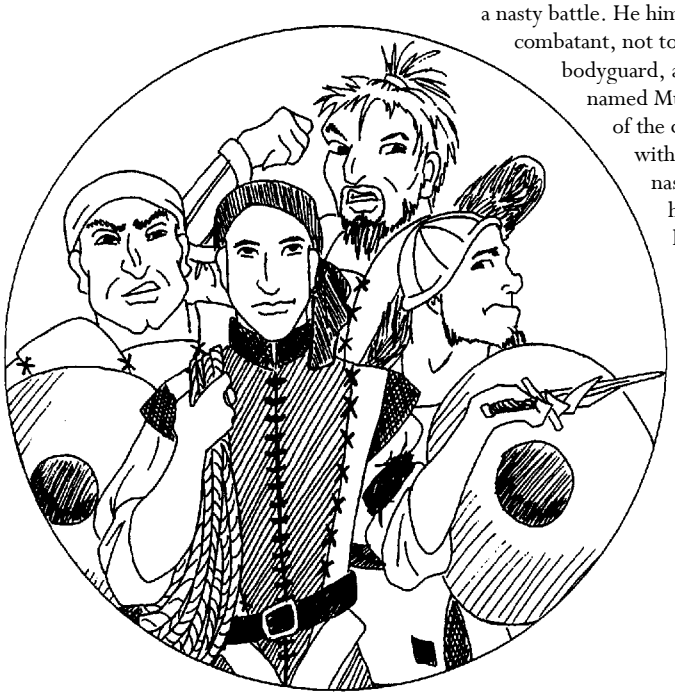
9 If Otell goes to Setrian, he'll get in touch with Corlan and cut a deal.

I1 Otell either dies or gives the rock to Corlan, who will let him live in this case.

Enter the Player-characters

Setrian will get very nervous and decide to bump off any characters whose meddling threatens to get too close either to Otell or the Baker's Guild. (Giving him some credit, Setrian wants to save his own skin, the sweet deal with Otell, AND the honor of the Guild.) He hires some dark and swarthy types living in the villages outside the walls of Minas Tirith to kill the characters (or, barring that, just frighten them badly).

The thug leader is a relatively talented assassin named Marten Osslin, and he has four men who will help him rough up the characters.



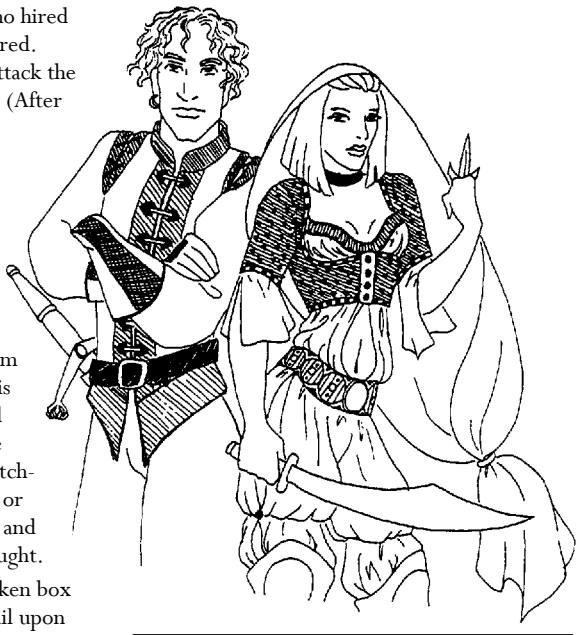
Only Marten knows the details of who hired him, and he won't crack unless tortured. Setrian's hired goons will prefer to attack the characters when and if they separate. (After all, they're just meant to scare them badly, not murder them.)

And if that wasn't bad enough, Corlan Larethan and his gang will come in to collect from Otell two days after Setrian cuts his deal. Otell will beg and plead for his life, and promise to show Corlan where the rock is. Corlan will agree and take him under guard to the river. If the rock is still there, Corlan will take it and kill Otell anyway, sinking his body in the river. If the characters are nearby watching, they can see this and either fight or talk with Corlan. He'll take the rock and return to Linhir in a day if he isn't caught.

Should the characters find the sunken box with the rock, bad fortune will prevail upon them. Corlan will come to town and proceed to berate Otell as before. If the rock is gone, though (presumably in the hands of the characters), Corlan will let Otell live and give him three days to find the rock or come up with the money he owes. Otell will go to Setrian for help. Corlan will fight characters if they have the rock (on the tip of Setrian), attempting to wipe out whoever is necessary to get it.

On hearing this news, Setrian (who has kept tabs on the inquiring characters) will suspect that the characters have found the rock. He'll contact Corlan directly and cut a deal: knowledge of who and where the characters are (with the rock), plus one favor from the Baker's Guild, in exchange for the relieving of Otell's debt (remember his sweet deal). Corlan will agree to this.

If Corlan fights the characters, it should be a nasty battle. He himself is an exceptional combatant, not to mention his personal bodyguard, a beautiful woman named Muraz, who hails from one of the deep desert tribes, armed with deadly weapons and nasty poisons. Additionally, he has three thugs in case he needs them.



All's Well That Ends

If the characters find the rock, by law it belongs to Lord Lothis and should be given back accordingly. If Otell lives and is found out, he will at best be severely fined and dismissed from the Baker's Guild and most likely ordered to leave Minas Tirith. In the worst scenario, he will be hung.

Setrian is a whiz at covering his tracks and his own skin. (Don't forget, he has spies and informants all over the city.) He'll pin all the blame on Otell for the entire mess, and as Otell's books have been fixed, there will be nothing to link Setrian to all the dirty dealings, except Otell's accusations (he can show them the books) and possibly Marten's words (if he is alive and has been tortured). Corlan and his men, as well as the thugs Setrian hires, can be punished for attempted murder by hanging.

It is quite possible that Corlan will take the rock and return to Linhir. If so, the characters might have an "enjoyable" time pursuing him, perhaps in disguise through the under-rabble. It might be any large, semi-dangerous city near where the original adventure took place if you are not using the Middle-earth setting. Linhir is detailed in *Havens of Gondor* and *The Kin-strife*.

If the characters wish to contact the Baker's Guild (also known as the Baker's Fellowship), they may certainly do so. I suggest consulting the Minas Tirith module or a similar reference if you want more information on fantasy Guild structure. In Minas Tirith, the head of the Guild will be as cordial as possible, particularly if the characters are known or in a position of authority. But he will do his best to also protect the Guild's interests if at all possible.

Facts at Hand

1. Niala, Elanir's maid, can give a reasonably good description of Isanar as she saw him by moon and candlelight: "He was tall and slender, with dark hair and fair skin. He wore dark clothing and was not a bad looking youth. I would know him if I saw him."
2. Karlana the barmaid can also identify Isanar, as they were old friends. She will be very hurt by his death and will insist that he was NOT a murderer, indeed not a very violent sort of man at all (just a poor, but talented, kleptomaniac).
3. Characters with Streetwise skills can try to learn about Isanar on the street as well, though most information will lead them to Karlana at the Old Guesthouse. She can tell them where his mother (a kindly, if senile old woman) lives in Woodentown. If anyone goes to look, Isanar has a spare set of thieves' tools and an old pair of boots with river mud (a good AK roll might rec ognize it) in his room.
4. The heavy wood/iron bound box that Otell buys is from a woodcrafter named Shan Melikan. He purchased the chain from a blacksmith named Nedlin Ormal. Both will remember selling these items specifically to Otell the Miller.

NPC Profiles (*Fantasy Hero* stats)

Corlan Larethan (master assassin/thief/ underworld figure)

[char 134 + skills 235 = 368 = 90 disads + 278 exp/villain bonus]

Corlan is a very handsome man of mostly Dinadan descent. He's tall, with tanned skin and black hair with reddish highlights, and blue eyes. He tends to dress in neutral colors, in well-made, but plain clothes. He is an exceptional businessman and rather ruthless except towards children. Not one for gruesome torture (unless absolutely necessary), he'll get an opponent down and take care of him as quickly as possible. Corlan has a moderate temper, and he very seldom is cruel to his men or Muraz, though he does keep them under a tight rein. Corlan is usually willing to bargain shrewdly if he sees potential gain in a situation.

Characteristics (total: 134)

18	STR	8	13-	CV -7 (+ combat and overall levels)
20	DEX	30	13-	ECV-5
15	CON	10	12-	move -3, 6, 9, 12
18	BOD	16		
18	INT	8	13-	
15	EGO	10	12-	
20	PRE	10	13-	
18	COM	4		
8	PD	4		
8	ED	5		
7	REC	-		
4	SPD	10		
40	END	5		
40	STN	14		

Skills (total: 235)

- 2 area knowledge (Gondor), 13-
- 3 city knowledge (Pelargir), 14-
- 3 breakfall, 13-
- 3 bribery, 13-
- 2 fam: common melee
- 2 common missile
- 2 uncommon melee
- 16 + 4 DC
- 5 concealment, 14-
- 5 forgery, 12-
- 5 lockpicking, 14-
- 7 stealth, 15-
- 4 Adûnaic
- - deduction, 8-
- 7 streetwise, 15-
- 3 survival, 11 -
- 20 10" run
- 3 1st aid, 12-
- 32 +4 combat
- 20 + 2 overall levels
- 5 climbing, 14-
- 5 disguise, 12-
- 5 gambling, 12-
- 7 shadowing, 13-
- - Westron
- - conversation, 8-
- - ride horse, 8-

Talents

- 5 combat sense, 14-
- 5 fast draw, 14-
- 7 resistance to torture, 14-
- 10 2D6 luck

Martial Arts

- 5 all out attack (+1 OCV -2 DCV +2 killing DC)
- 4 attack (+2 DCV +1 killing DC)
- 4 defend (+2 OCV +2 DCV, block)
- 4 dodge (+ 5 DCV)
- 4 offensive strike (-2 OCV +1 DCV total 9D6)

Disadvantages (total: 368)

- 20 hunted by Gondorian authorities, 11-, more powerful, NCI
- 10 loyal to men
- 10 reputation, 8-, ruthless underworld figure
- 10 has a soft spot for young children
- 15 enraged if blood drawn on him in combat, 8-, 11-
- 10 rival with another underground figure, former lover
- 15 highly allergic to mushrooms, 2D6 every turn
- 278 exp/villain bonus

Notable Items

Handsome broadsword with jeweled hilt (exceptional balance, gives an additional + 1 OCV; for base stats of +2 OCV, 1D6+ 1)

Velvet scabbard matches broadsword (2D6 healing aid (twice per day) to bearer)

5 darts (1D6 AP attack, coated with virulent poison, 3D6 and linked with 1D6 killing attack if body done)

5 smoke bombs (allow 2" radius darkness cloud when smashed on the ground)

Earring (gives 1/4 physical and energy resistant damage reduction)

Armor

Gondorian style helm (+8, 4-5)
hard leather breast plate (+5, 10-13)
leather gloves and arms (+4, 6-9)
hard leather leggings (+6, 14-16)
leather boots (+4, 17-18)

Marten Osslin (assassin/thief)

[char 119 + skills 165 = 284 = 70 disads + 214 exp/villain bonus]

Like Corlan, Marten is of mixed Dúnadan descent. He has medium brown hair and blue eyes and is fair of skin. Marten is more of a thief than an assassin, though he'll do whatever is needed to advance his reputation and widen his wallet. He seeks to develop his own "thieves Guild" of sorts in Minas Tirith. He's somewhat quick to anger and occasionally does things he's later sorry for.

Characteristics (total: 119)

15	STR	5	12-	CV-6 (+combat and overall levels) *
18	DEX	24	13-	ECV -5
IS	CON	10	12-	move -3, 6, 9, 12
15	BOD	10		
15	INT	5	12-	
15	EGO	10	12-	
15	PRE	5	12-	
14	COM	2		
8	PD	5		
8	ED	5		
6	REC	-		
4	SPD	12		
38	END	4		
38	STN	7		

Skills (total: 165)

- 2 area knowledge (Gondor), 12-
- 3 breakfall, 13-
- 3 bribery, 13
- 2 fam: common melee
- 2 common missile
- 2 uncommon melee
- 16 +4 DC
- 5 concealment, 13-
- 5 forgery, 12-
- 5 lockpicking, 14-
- 7 stealth, 15-
- 4 Adûnaic
- - deduction, 8-
- 7 streetwise, 14-
- 3 survival, 11 –
- 16 8" run
- 3 1st aid, 12-
- 24 +3 combat
- 10 +1 overall level
- 5 climbing, 14-
- 5 disguise, 12-
- 5 gambling, 12-
- 7 shadowing, 13-
- - Westron
- - conversation, 8-
- - ride horse, 8-

Talents

- 5 fast draw, 14-
- 7 resistance to torture, 14-

Martial Arts

4 attack (+2 DCV, +1 killing DC) 4 defend (+2 OCV, +2 DCV, block)
4 dodge (+5 DCV)

Disadvantages (total: 284)

20 hunted by Gondorian authorities, 11-, more powerful, NCI
10 reputation, 8-, thief for hire
10 notorious rake
10 2D6unluck
10 dependent NPC girlfriend, 11 -
10 overconfident
214 exp/vilkin bonus

Notable Items

Umbarean bastard sword (l'AD6).

2 throwing daggers (1D6 AP, coated with an Umbarean poison that does a 5D6 end drain if body done)

2 healing draughts (restore 3D6 stun each)

Ring (once per day gives full invisibility for 6 turns)

Armor

hard leather cap (+5, 4-5)
hard leadier breast plate (+5, 10-13)
leather gloves and arms (+4, 6-9)
hard leather leggings (+6, 14-16)
leather boots (+4, 17-18)

MURAZ

(BODYGUARD/MASTER ASSASSIN)

[char 130 + 281 skills = 411 points = 3 21 exp/villain bonus]

Muraz is of average height with bronzed skin and brown eyes. Her hair is shoulder length and a beautiful shade of golden blond. She usually wears baggy trousers of brightly colored material, a tight-fitting bodice, and a gauzy blouse along with her veils (some magical, some not). She was purchased in Umbar by Corlan who has always treated her with great kindness and respect, thereby gaining her devout loyalty. Muraz was kidnapped and badly treated by the Umbareans and has a passionate hatred for them.

Characteristics (total: 130)

15	STR	5	12-	CV-7
21	DEX	36	13-	ECV-5
20	CON	20	13-	move -3, S, 8, 10, 12
10	BOD	-		
15	INT	5	12-	
13	EGO	6	12-	
18	PRE	8	13-	
20	COM	5		
8	PD	5		
8	ED	4		
5	SPD	19		
10	REC	10		
40	END	-		
35	STN	7		

Skills (total: 281)

2 area knowledge (Gondor), 12-
3 city knowledge (Pelargir), 13-
4 area knowledge (desert country), 14-
20 10" run
5 seduction, 14-
32 +4 combat
20 +2 overall levels
5 climbing, 14-
5 disguise, 12-
5 gambling, 12-
5 lip-reading, 12-
7 shadowing, 13-
- Paz
4 Westron
- conversation, 8-
- ride horse, 8-
3 sleight of hand
7 streetwise, 15-
3 acrobatics, 13-
3 breakfall, 13-
2 fam: common melee
2 common missile
2 uncommon melee
16 +4 DC
5 concealment, 14-
15 +3 in hand to hand (DCV)
5 interrogation, 14-
5 lockpicking, 14-
7 stealth, 15-
5 contortions, 14-
3 Adûnaic
- deduction, 8-
3 persuasion, 13-
6 +2 to offset range pen.

Talents

5 combat sense, 14-
5 fast draw, 14-
3 ambidextrous
2 immunity to desert poisons
5 1D6 luck
7 resistance to torture, 14-
5 defense maneuver
3 simulate death
20 missile deflection with weapon (-¼), +3 to roll

Martial Arts

4 attack (+2 DCV, + 1 killing DC)
4 defend (+2 OCV, +2 DCV, block)
4 dodge (+5 DCV)
5 offensive strike (-2 OCV, +1 DCV, total 9D6)

Disadvantages (total: 411)

15 hunted by Gondorian forces, 8-, more powerful, NCI
15 extremely loyal to Corlan
10 cannot read or write
10 reputation, 8-, as assassin and Corlan's bodyguard
20 enraged when Corlan hurt, 14-, 8-
10 dist. ftr. extreme & exotic beauty
10 hates Umbareans
311 exp/villain bonus

Notable Items

Constricting rope (takes a full action to throw and tighten. 3D6 entangle with backlash continuous until cut free, roll 1D6 more BOD for entangle if target fails to break free in one attempt)

Entangling veils (4D6 normal entangle 6 charges)

Poisoned darts (1D6 AP darts coated with 2D6 body drain poison if they do body damage)

Poisoned oil (3 charges nasty poison sealed in animal bladder on impact with skin will do 4D6 stun drain and cause extreme pain)

Scimitar (1D6+2 damage +1 OCV)

2 throwing daggers (1D6 AP 3D6 STR drain from poison if body done)

Garrote (2½D6 only usable on an extremity-ankle, hand, neck, etc.) Protective girdle (+6 armor all over body, ¼ resistant physical and energy damage reduction)

Armor

leather leggings (+ 4, 14-18)
leather gloves (+4, 6-7)
iron neck collar (+8 on neck)

All-purpose Thieving Thugs

[char 58 + skills 73 = 131 points = disads 25 + exp/gratis 106]

Characteristics (total: 58)

13	STR	3	12-	CV-S
15	DEX	IS	12-	ECV-3
13	CON	6	12-	
11	BOD	2		
13	INT	3		
13	PRE	3		
10	COM	-		
6	PD	3		
4	ED	1		
4	SPD	IS		
6	REC	-		
30	STN	7		
26	END	-		

Skills (total: 73)

2 area knowledge (Gondor), 12-
2 city knowledge (Minas Tirith), 11-
12 6" run
6 +2 with sword
3 streetwise, 12-
3 survival, 11-
2 fam: common missile
3 stealth, 12-
3 lockpicking, 12-
1 breakfall, 8-
10 +1 overall level
5 +1 hth
8 +1 combat
2 fam: common melee
3 climbing, 12-

Martial Arts

4 dodge (+5 DCV)
4 attack (+2 DCV, +1 killing DQ

Disadvantages (total: 131)

106 gratis/exp
5 1D6 unluck
10 hunted by Gondor, more powerful, NCI, 8-
10 obeys leaders

Armor

leather cap (+4, 4-5)

leather hauberk (+4, 9-13)

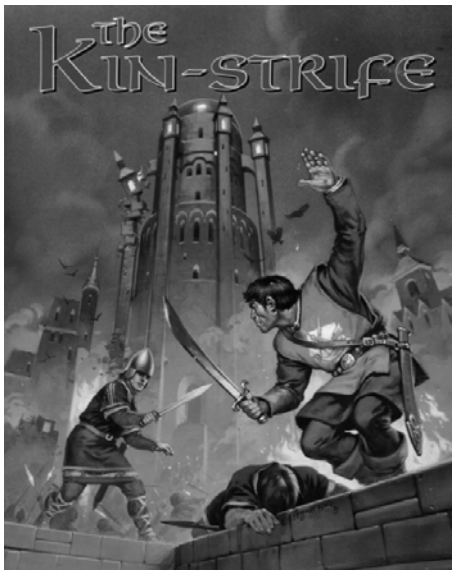
leather leg greaves (+4, 14-17)

leather vambraces/gloves (+4, 6-8)

All thugs are armed with typical Gondorian broadswords (+1 OCV), 1D6+1 damage and small shields (+1 OCV).

Product Review

Two Reviews of *The Kin-strife*



Anders Blixt et.al.

***The Kin-strife* (Middle-earth Sourcebook #2015)**

Charlottesville, Virginia
Iron Crown Enterprises, 1995.

My, what tangled webs we weave! This review of *The Kin-strife* is intended to address those parts of the work that deal with history and information as opposed to the adventures themselves. The adventurers, while interesting of themselves are, to my mind, incidental to the primary information presented within the module itself. (It is, after all, entitled a "Sourcebook.") It is from this information that an astute reader may evolve and develop their own nasty, back-stabbing and deadly Machiavellian adventures that may or may not be based on the adventures contained in the Sourcebook. Besides, how many of you out there really do run the adventures from these modules complete and wholesale? This is not to say that the adventures do not contain valuable information concerning possibilities and situations during the Kin-strife, but to point out that the tapestry upon which they are woven is detailed and presented in such a way that additional or modified adventures may be developed.

The single greatest strength of this work is the fact that it is rooted, as so many other *MERP* modules are not, to a particular era in time and space in Middle-earth (in this case, to the realm of Gondor in 1432 to 1437 of the Third Age). Given this basis for the information presented within, it is possible, which the authors have done in great detail, to flesh out this era, breathe life into it and provide us with a wealth of information, speculation, and possibilities for our own extrapolations. It allows for greater detail to be developed by placing an era restraint on the material in the module, and in fleshing out the background under which the concurrent adventures and overall campaign may be developed. People may be detailed, lands and cities may be specified, and an overall campaign may be developed through which a hapless group of PCs may wander. The entire package lends itself, of course, to the development of an overall campaign set in Gondor during that time, from the rebellion to whatever may occur as a result (or not) of the players.

Each section of the module revolves, beyond supporting material and an introduction to the Kin-strife, around each of the major Gondorian cities and locales during this period: Pelargir, Umbar, Lond Ernil, Osgiliath, Minas Anor, and Minas Ithil. These sections contain relevant information concerning the cities themselves and the surrounding countryside. In addition to this, local information of important areas in the city, types of people found, NPCs and the like are included.

The city descriptions are well-organized and laid out to make it easy to read the introduction, then to read a specific city area, and then to launch the players into action within that city. Just enough information is found in each city section to allow the players enough information about their location and the area, with just enough information for the GM to run the adventures and from there to develop their own, further adventures.

The introduction on the Kin-strife and the backgrounds of the major players in it is fascinating reading, well-conceived and developed. I particularly liked the development of the Usurper's secret police, the Côr Aran. There is nothing like the intimations of death squads, clandestine surveillance, corruption and absolute power placed in the hands of ruthless people to make the hairs climb up the nape of my neck just thinking about the possibilities for creeping out and messing up a group of PCs!

The feeling that I got while reading through *The Kin-strife* was one of a great potential to thrust a group of PCs into a confusing, paranoiac morass of political intrigue and ambition. All of the worst possibilities for back-stabbing, backbiting, game-playing, politicking and betrayal exist in this module. Machiavelli comes to Middle-earth, and all the pieces are presented there in the Sourcebook to allow the referee and the players access to the information needed to bring just such an atmosphere to the gaming table.

Pretty good, huh? A lot of great information, well-organized and conceived. I particularly liked the guidelines for running mass land battles and naval battles in section 10, and especially liked section 11.3 on warships, which shows stats and data for common Gondorian warships. Ahoy mateys! Let's run a few naval battles and fight some pirates! Not even to mention the entire section on the origins of the civil war and the struggle for the crown.

But what didn't I like about it? Well, here we go on that one…

Though a good idea up front—and it provides a good unifying sub-plot to the overall campaign—I found myself vaguely disturbed by the influence and development of the cult of Benish Armon. I am, in many ways, a Tolkien purist—not a rabid one mind you, but just enough of one to want the same philosophies and sense of magic and wonder to exist in the *Middle-earth Role playing* aids that I see.

I often find myself having problems with certain kinds of magic set in the Middle-earth milieu. Magic resides in things that are derived from Aman and the Valar, as well as the workings of those beings and those who have been close to them, namely, the Elves. The authors of *The Kin-strife* do an admirable job of avoiding the usage and development of those things magical, except in those cases where there exists a link of similar nature, like the cult of Benish Armon and the Kuilëondo.

Consequently, I feel that the primary nature of the remaining servants of Morgoth in Middle-earth, of which Sauron is the chief, is one of corruption based on the seduction of principal weaknesses. In this case, it is the seduction of the men of Númenor (and, by extension, the Dúnedain) through their pride and desire to be deathless.

To me, the Kin-strife revolves around the first of these issues. The pride of the Dúnadan, and the effect that the policy of the purity of bloodlines has on their society. Is it not, therefore, fitting that the Usurper, in his reign, should declare that Ancient Númenor is reborn—Númenor, which, through its pride and ambition, fell, corrupted by Sauron's influence? Sauron has designs on bringing about the downfall of Gondor. He's already been actively working on the downfall of Arnor, so why the cult of Benish Armon? It just doesn't seem his style. Anyway, a "cult" influence seemed out of place to me, though it may not to you.

Secondly, and finally (There really isn't anything here that I disliked too much!!), I loved the Sourcebook as an illumination of the time, with its explanations, thought and extrapolations of the society and internal makeup of Gondor during the Kin-strife. There is a wealth of information, places, people, settings, locales and adventures. But it seemed to lack the nature of the fantastic, perhaps an echo of the feeling that many of us had when we first read *The Lord of the Rings.*

It read a bit dry. But, what it has in dryness it makes up for in interestingness. Interesting in terms of running a campaign that is involved in the resistance, or running a campaign to save the heirs of the Prince of Morthond, or playing cat and mouse with the Côr Aran. Lots of possibility, but a possibility that, though grounded in a fantastic environment, with inklings of the fantastic has too much of the workings of what is earthly.

Take a group of PCs into the clutches of the Usurper's secret police, save the life of the exiled King, run a resistance cell in Pelargir, fight naval battles against the Usurper's navies. Read about what life must have been like in Gondor before Minas Ithil became Minas Morgul, when Osgiliath was still inhabited, when Gondor was still ruled by Kings. Well, almost!!

***Reviewer:* Mark A. Merrell**

The Kin-strife (Middle-earth Sourcebook #2015)

Charlottesville, Virginia Iron Crown Enterprises, 1995.

The Kin-strife is one of the new sourcebooks for *Middle-earth Role Playing,* a slightly unusual one in being fixed not only spatially, but also temporally, set in Gondor during the rule of Castamir the Usurper (T.A. 1437—1447). Several subscribers to this magazine, and even the editor, are authors to this weighty tome, so I ought to be polite about it!

Being polite is very easy, because the quality of the material is something that other new ICE publications are going to have to live up to. The artwork and cartography is ICE's usual high standard, although some of the maps look as if they are black-and-white versions of colour originals, with a loss of some labels; for instance the Dor-en-Ernil map is very hard to read. The general layout is good, and the scene at the beginning of Orodreth's death sets the tone for the rest of the book very well.

The book is laid out in sections; a preliminary one telling the general history of the conflict, the politics which lead up to the rebellion, and the loyalist discontent underlying the superimposed peace which will ultimately bring down the Usurper. Following this are section on each of the major cities of Gondor: Dor-en-Ernil, Minas Anor, Minas Ithil, Osgiliath, Pelargir, and Umbar. Each of these chapters describes the area around the city, the city itself, the bigwigs and the hoi polloi, major NPCs, and gives three Pret-a-jouer adventures. At the end is a section of Gamesmaster Advice, pointing out the problems of running city-based campaigns. There is also a section on running mass battles on land and at sea, although I would have thought that characters would avoid large combats, especially as most of the adventures are set inside cities, where fighting would be discouraged. Lastly, there are tables of *RM* and *MERP* stats for all the NPCs. This is where I feel the system-specific detail should be, tucked away at the back in an appendix so that GM's from other systems do not feel left out, and so that tedious rules do not interfere with the flow of the text.

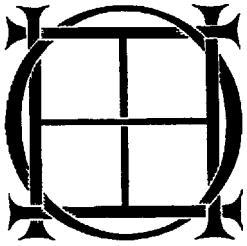
The adventures are of a different style from the ones that ICE has often produced. I thought that it might be appropriate for me to review them as I have played some of the Dor-en-Ernil and Osgiliath adventures in their draft stage. I have to say that it makes a huge difference to read the "Death in the Family" adventure as the GM is supposed to see it, rather than the maze of confusing events which we were presented with by Chris Seeman. Now I can see what was going on behind the scenes, and it's still confusing—a very Tolkienian sense of interlacement. Chris' campaign two years ago involved non-stop thinking and talking in character with hardly a die-roll, and from reading most of the adventures in *The Kin-strife,* the others appear to be similar.

They have much more of the correct "Tolkien" feel, rather than being adapted *D&D* treasure hunts. There are long detailed descriptions of people (more complex than the way I managed to play Castaher!), their aims, their worries, their interactions, and a plan of events for the adventure (assuming all goes well) but not a single heap of treasure (except Haradan books) to be found, even in the tomb-robbing adventure. It would seem that in this world, information, contacts and favours are worth far more than gold. (This is not a criticism—how much gold got spent in *The Lord of the Rings?)*

If I have even a small niggle, it is that the adventures assume that the characters will have loyalist feelings and will want to do their small bit to bring down Castamir. Can't we have an adventure for some trainee Côr Aran agents rooting out The Horrid Scum? Or even be sent to hunt down and try to assassinate Eldacar? (I know this would risk altering the primary work, but still.) The nearest we come is the "Council of Gondor," which would be fascinating to roleplay. The Oxford Roleplaying Society has a similar ongoing campaign called "Thieves Guild" where the characters sit round a table and discuss the Guild's business. The purpose being to intrigue and gain power and influence.

This book is a success on several levels. Clearly a labour of love on the part of real enthusiasts who have gone so far as to include their extensive reading list, this is far superior to previous ICE products. As an episode in a political history of Gondor, *The Kin-strife* would appeal to non-roleplayers with an interest in Tolkien. This is helped by the lack of *MERP* stats in the text. As a roleplaying sourcebook, it has all the necessary detail for a GM and the players to really live in this time, while not filling the pages with descriptions of hoards of +5 swords and gold pieces. I look forward to the rest of their new titles.

***Reviewer:* James Owen**



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